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LYONESSE

By R. JERE BLACK, Jr.

Beneath the softly sobbing sea,
Sad cities crumble silently,
Pale kings peer down from futile thrones,
Pale queens lament with soundless moans,
Recalling vanished loveliness,
In long-forgotten Lyonesse.

Pale ladies smile so eerily,
The years creep by so wearily,
The surges sob so drearily,
In far, forsaken Lyonesse.

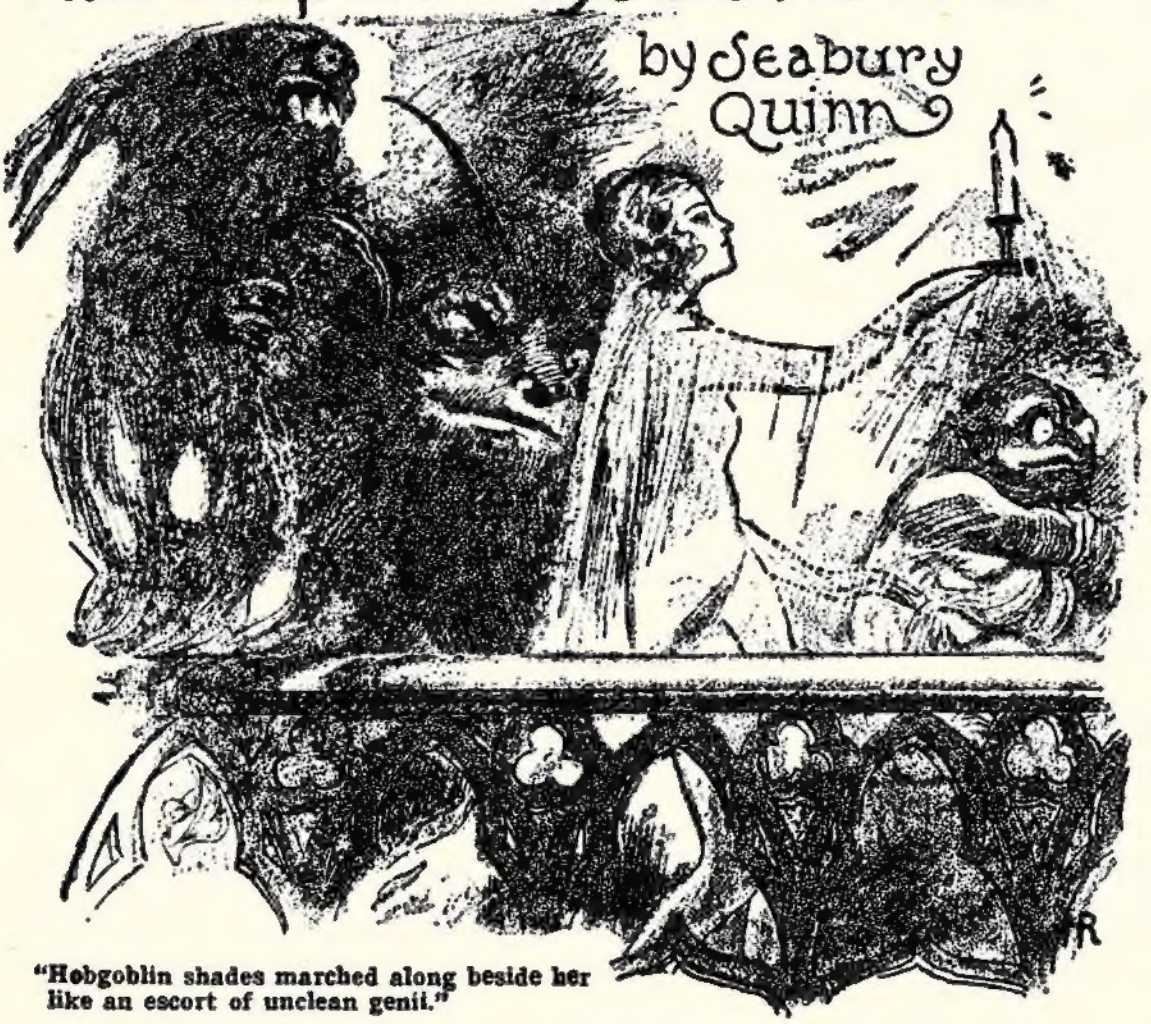
Pale knights sway restless to and fro
When Neptune's distant bugles blow;
Pale nuns, among the pallid weeds,
Count ceaselessly their coral beads,
With mild and gentle wofulness
In weird and wistful Lyonesse.

Pale lovers watch, with wan despair,
Pale maidens' floating golden hair;
Pale jesters' tarnished cap-and-bells
Chime faintly with the ocean swells
A requiem of tenderness
For lost and lonely Lyonesse.

Pale ladies smile so eerily,
The years creep by so wearily,
The surges sob so drearily,
In dead and drownèd Lyonesse.

The Chapel of Mystic Horror

by Seabury Quinn



"Hobgoblin shades marched along beside her like an escort of unclean genii."

THE wind was blowing half a gale and little spits of sudden snow were whirling through the gray November twilight as we alighted from the accommodation train and looked expectantly up and down the uncovered way-station platform. "Seasonable weather for Thanksgiving," I murmured, setting my face against the howling blast and making for the glowing disk of the station-master's light.

"*Barbe d'un pélican,* yes!" assented Jules de Grandin, sinking his chin an inch or so lower in the fur collar of his overcoat. "A polar bear might give thanks for a warm fireside on such a night!"

"Trowbridge—I say there—Trowbridge!" a voice hailed from the lee side of the little red-brick depot as my friend Tandy Van Riper stepped forward, waving a welcoming hand. "This way, old-timer; the car's waiting—so's dinner.

"Glad to meet you, Dr. de Grandin," he acknowledged as I presented the little Frenchman; "it was mighty good of you to come out with Trowbridge and help us light the hearth fires at the Cloisters."

"Ah, then it is a new house that

you have, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked as he dropped into a seat in Van Riper's luxurious Daimler landau and tucked the bearskin carriage rug snugly about his knees.

"Well, yes and no," our host replied. "The house has been up —in America—for something like eight years, I believe, but it's new to us. We've been in residence just a little over a month, and we're giving a regular old-fashioned Thanksgiving party by way of housewarming."

"U'm," the Frenchman nodded thoughtfully. "Your pardon, *Monsieur*, it is perhaps that I do not speak the American well, but did you not say the new house has been up in this country for only eight years? I fear I do not apprehend. Is it that the house stood elsewhere before being erected here?"

"Precisely," Van Riper agreed with a laugh. "The Cloisters were built—or rebuilt, I suppose you'd say —by Miles Batterman shortly after the close of the World War. Batterman made a potful of money during the war, and a lot more in lucky speculations between the Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles. I reckon he didn't know just what to do with it all, so he blew in a couple of hundred thousand on an old Cyprian villa, had it taken down stone by stone, shipped over here, and re-erected. The building was a sort of remodeled monastery, I believe, and took Batterman's eye while he was cruising about the Mediterranean in '20. He went to a lot of trouble having it moved here and put up, and everything about the place is exactly as it was in Cyprus, except the heating and plumbing, which he added as a sort of afterthought. Quaint idea, wasn't it?"

"Decidedly," the Frenchman agreed. "And this Monsieur Batterman, did he so soon tire of his expensive toy?"

"Humph, not exactly. I got it from the administrators. I couldn't have afforded to pay a quarter the price Batterman spent on the place, let alone give him a profit on the transaction, but the fact is the old boy dropped off suddenly a year or so ago—so did his wife and daughter. The doctors said they died from eating toadstools by mistake for mushrooms. Whatever the cause was, the whole family died in a single night and the property would have gone to the State by escheat if the lawyers hadn't dug up some ninety-second cousins out in Omaha. We bought the house at public auction for about a tenth its value, and I'm figuring on holding it for a while. It'll be a novel sensation, living in a place the Knights Templars once occupied, eh?"

"Very novel—very novel, indeed, *Monsieur*," de Grandin replied in a queer, flat voice. "You say the Knights of the Temple once occupied this house?"

"So they tell me—some of their old furniture's still in it."

De Grandin made an odd sound in his throat, and I turned quickly to look at him, but his face was as set and expressionless as the features of a Japanese Buddha, and if the half-smothered exclamation had been meant for conversation, he had evidently thought better of it, for he sat in stony silence during the rest of the drive.

THE snow squalls had stopped by the time we drew up at the house, but the wind had increased in velocity, and in the zenith we could see the gibbous moon buffeted about in a surf of windblown clouds. Against the background of the winter sky the irregular outline of the Cloisters loomed in a forbidding silhouette. It was a high, rambling pile of gray masonry in which the characteristics of Romanesque, Gothic and Byzantine architecture were oddly blended. The walls were strengthened by a series of buttresses, crenelated with battlements and punctuated here and there

with small, cylindrical watch-towers; the windows were mere slits between the great stones, and the massive entranceway seemed fitted for a portcullis, yet a great, hemispherical dome rose from the center of the building, and a wide, shallow portico with graceful, fluted columns topped by Doric capitals stood before the gateway.

Cocktail hour had just struck as we passed through the wide entrance to the main hall, and a party of sleek-haired gentlemen and ladies in fashionably scanty attire were gathered before the cavernous fireplace, chatting and laughing as they imbibed the appetite-whetting amber drinks.

It was an enormous apartment, that hall, clear fifty feet from tiled floor to vaulted ceiling, and the darkness was scarcely more than stained by the flickering glow of blazing logs in the fireplace and the yellow beams of the tall, ecclesiastical candles which stood, singly, in high, wrought-iron standards at intervals along the walls. Draped down the bare stone sides of the hall hung a pair of prodigious tapestries, companion pieces, I thought, depicting particularly gory battle scenes, and I caught a fugitive glimpse of a black-armored knight with a cross-emblazoned surtout hacking the turbaned head from a saracen, and the tag end of the Latin legend beneath—*"ad Majorem Dei Gloriam."*

Piloted by our host we mounted the wide, balustraded staircase to the second of three balconies which ran round three sides of the long hall, found the big, barnlike room assigned us, changed quickly to dinner clothes, and joined the other guests in time to file through a high archway to the oak-paneled apartment where dinner was served by candle-light on a long refectory table set with the richest silver and most opulent linen I had ever seen.

Greatly to his chagrin de Grandin drew a kittenish, elderly spinster with gleaming and palpably false dentition. I was paired off with a Miss O'Shane, a tall, tawny-haired girl with tapering, statuesque limbs and long, smooth-jointed fingers, the milk-white skin of the pure-bred Celt and smoldering, rebellious eyes of indeterminate color.

During the soup and fish courses she was taciturn to the point of churlishness, responding to my attempts at conversation with curt, unisyllabic replies, but as the claret glasses were filled for the roast, she turned her strange, half-resentful gaze directly on me and demanded: "Dr. Trowbridge, what do you think of this house?"

"Why—er," I temporized, scarcely knowing what to reply, "it seems rather gorgeous, but——"

"Yes," she interrupted as I paused at a loss for an exact expression, "but what?"

"Well, rather depressing—too massive and mediæval for present-day people, if you get what I mean."

"I do," she nodded almost angrily. "I most certainly do. It's beastly. I'm a painter—a painter of sorts," she hurried on as my eyes opened in astonishment at her vehemence, "and I brought along some gear to work with between times during the party. Van told me this is liberty hall, and I could do exactly as I pleased, and gave me a big room on the north side for a workshop. I've a commission I've simply got to finish in two weeks, and I began some preliminary sketches yesterday, but——" She paused, taking a sip of burgundy and looking at me from the corners of her long, brooding eyes as though speculating whether or not to take me further into her confidence.

"Yes?" I prompted, assuming an air of interest.

"It's no go. Do you remember the Red King in *Through the Looking-Glass?*"

"The Red King?" I echoed. "I'm afraid I don't, quite."

"Don't you remember how Alice took the end of his pencil in her hand when he was attempting to enter a note in his diary and made him write, 'The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly'?"

I must have looked my bewilderment, for she laughed aloud, a deep, gurgling laugh in keeping with her rich, contralto speaking voice. "Oh, I'm not a psychopathic case—I hope," she assured me, "but I'm certainly in a position to sympathize with the poor king. It's a Christmas card I'm doing—a nice, frosty, sugar-sweet Christmas card—and I'm supposed to have a Noël scene with oxen and asses and sheep standing around the manger of a chubby little naked boy, you know—quite the conventional sort of thing." She paused again and refreshed herself with a sip of wine, and I noticed that her strong, white-fingered hand trembled as she raised the etched glass to her lips.

My professional interest was roused. The girl was a splendid, vital animal, lean and strong as Artemis, and the pallor of her pale skin was natural, not unhealthy; yet it required no special training to see she labored under an almost crushing burden of suppressed nervousness.

"Won't it work out?" I asked soothingly.

"No!" her reply was almost explosive. "No, it won't! I can block in the interior, all right, though it doesn't look much like a stable; but when it comes to the figures, something outside me—*behind* me, like Alice behind the Red King, you know, and just as invisible—seems to snatch the end of my charcoal and guide it. I keep drawing——" Another pause, longer, this time, broke her recital.

"Drawing what, if you please, *Mademoiselle?*" De Grandin turned from his partner who was in the midst of recounting a risqué anecdote and leaned forward, his narrow eyebrows elevated in twin arches, his little, round blue eyes fixed and unwinking in a direct, questioning stare.

The girl started at his query. "Oh, all manner of things," she began, then broke off with a sharp, cachinnating laugh, half hysterical. "Just what the Red King said when *his* pencil wouldn't work!" she shrilled.

For a moment I thought the little Frenchman would strike her, so fierce was the uncompromising gaze he bent on her; then: "*Ah bah,* let us not think too much of fairy-tales, pleasant or grim, if you please, *Mademoiselle,*" he returned. "After dinner, if you will be so good, Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of inspecting these so mysterious self-dictated drawings of yours. Until then, let us consider this excellent food which the good Monsieur Van Riper has provided for us." Abruptly he turned to his neglected partner. "Yes, *Mademoiselle,*" he murmured in his deferential, flattering manner, "and then the bishop said to the rector——?"

2

DINNER completed, we trooped into the high, balconied hall for coffee, tobacco and liqueurs. A radio, artfully disguised as a mediæval Flemish console, squawked jazz with a sputtering obbligato of static, and some of the guests danced, while the rest gathered at the rim of the pool of firelight and talked in muted voices. Somehow, the great stone house seemed to discourage frivolity by the sheer weight of its antiquity.

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin whispered almost fiercely in my ear as he plucked me by the sleeve, "Mademoiselle O'Shane awaits our pleasure. Come, let us go to her studio at once before old *Mère l'Oie* tells me another of her so detestable stories of unvirtuous clergymen!"

Grinning as I wondered how the little Frenchman's late dinner partner would have enjoyed hearing herself referred to as Mother Goose, I

followed him up the first flight of stairs, crossed the lower balcony and ascended a second stairway, narrow and steeper than the first, to the upper gallery where Miss O'Shane waited before the heavily carved door of a great, cavelike room paneled from flagstone floor to beamed ceiling with age-blackened oak wainscot. Candles seemed the only mode of illumination available in the house, and our hostess had lighted half a dozen tapers which stood in two antique girandoles so that their luminance fell directly on an oblong of eggshell bristol board anchored to her easel by thumbtacks.

"Now, here's what I started to do," she began, indicating the sketch with a long, beautifully manicured forefinger. "This was supposed to be the inside of the stable at Bethlehem, and —*oh?*" The short, half-choked exclamation, uttered with a puzzled, questioning rising inflection, cut short her sentence, and she stared at her handiwork as though it were something she had never seen before.

Leaning forward, I examined the embryonic picture curiously. As she had said at dinner, the interior, rough and elementary as it was, did not resemble a stable. Crude and rough it undoubtedly was, but with a rudeness unlike that of a barn. Cubic, rough-hewn stones composed the walls, and the vaulting of the concamerated roof was supported by a series of converging arches with piers based on blocks of oddly carved stone representing wide, naked feet, toes forward, standing on the crowns of hideous, gargoylish heads with half-human, half-reptilian faces which leered hellishly in mingled torment and rage beneath the pressure. In the middle foreground was a raised rectangular object which reminded me of a flat-topped sarcophagus, and beside it, slightly to the rear, there loomed the faint, spectral outline of a sinister, cowled figure with menacing, upraised hand, while in the lower foreground crouched, or rather groveled, a second figure, a long, boldly sketched female form with outstretched, supplicating hands and face concealed by a cascade of downward-sweeping hair. Back of the hooded, monkish form were faint outlines of what had apparently first been meant to represent domestic animals, but I could see where later, heavier pencil strokes had changed them into human shapes resembling the cowled and hooded figure.

I shuddered involuntarily as I turned from the drawing, for not only in half-completed line and suggestive curve, but also in the intangible spirit of the thing was the suggestion of something bestial and unhallowed. Somehow, the thing seemed to suggest something revolting, something pregnant with the disgusting incongruity of a ribald song bawled in church when the *Kyrie* should be sung, or of rose-water sprinkled on putrefying offal.

De Grandin's slender dark brown eyebrows elevated till they almost met the shoreline of his sleekly combed fair hair, and the waxed points of his diminutive blond mustache reared upward like a pair of horns as he pursed his thin lips, but he made no verbal comment.

Not so Miss O'Shane. As though a sudden draft of air had blown through the room, she shivered, and I could see the tiny hummocks of horripilation rise on her forearms as she stared, wide-eyed, at her own creation. "It wasn't like that!" she exclaimed in a thin, rasping whisper like the ghost of a scream. "*I* didn't do *that!*"

"Eh, how do you say, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin challenged, regarding her with his unwinking cat-stare. "You would have us to understand that——"

"Yes!" She still spoke in a sort of awed, wondering whisper. "I didn't draw it that way! I blocked in the interior and made it of stone, for I was pretty sure the Holy Land

stables were masonry, but I didn't draw those beastly arch-supports! They were just plain blocks of stone when I made them. I did put in the arches—not that I wanted to, but because I felt *compelled* to do it, but this—this is all different!" Her words trailed off till we could scarcely catch them, not because of lowered tone, but because they came higher, thinner, with each syllable. Stark, unreasoning terror had her by the throat, I could see, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she managed to breathe.

"H'm," de Grandin tweaked the pointed ends of his mustache. "Let us recapitulate, if you please, *Mademoiselle:* Yesterday and today you worked on this sketch? Yes? You drew what you conceived to be a Jewish stable in the days of Cæsar Augustus—and what else, if you recall?"

"Just the stable and the bare outlines of the manger, then a half-completed figure which was to have been Joseph, and the faintest outlines of the animals and a kneeling figure before the cradle—I hadn't determined whether it would be male or female, or whether it would be full-draped or not, for I wasn't sure whether I'd have the Magi or the shepherds or just some of the village folk adoring the Infant, you see. I gave up working about 4 this afternoon, because the light was beginning to fail and because——"

"*Eh bien,* because of what, if you please, *Mademoiselle?*" the Frenchman prompted sharply as the girl dropped her recital.

"Because there seemed to be an actual physical opposition to my work—almost as if an invisible hand were gently but insistently forcing my pencil to draw things I hadn't conceived—things I was *afraid* to draw! Now, do you think I'm crazy?"

She paused again, breathing audibly through slightly parted lips, and I could see the swelling of her throat as she swallowed convulsively once or twice.

Ignoring her question, the little Frenchman regarded her thoughtfully a moment, then examined the drawing once more. "This who was to have been the good Saint Joseph, now," he asked softly, "was he robed after this fashion when you limned him?"

"No, I'd only roughed out the body. He had no face when I quit work."

"U'm, *Mademoiselle,* he is still without a face," de Grandin replied.

"Yes, but there's a place for his face in the opening of his hood, and if you look closely you can almost see his features—his eyes, especially. I can feel them on me, and they're not good. They're bad, wicked, cruel—like a snake's or a devil's. See, he's robed like a monk; I didn't draw him that way!"

De Grandin took up one of the candelabra and held it close to the picture, scanning the obscene thing with an unhurried, critical stare, then turned to us with a half-impatient shrug. "*Tenez,* my friends," he remarked, "I fear we make ourselves most wretchedly unhappy over a matter of small moment. Come, let us join the others."

3

MIDNIGHT had struck and de Grandin and I had managed to lose something like thirty dollars at the bridge tables before the company broke up for the evening.

"Do you really think that poor O'Shane girl is a little off her rocker?" I asked as we made ready for bed.

"I doubt it," he replied as he fastened the sash of his pale lavender pajama jacket with a nervous tug; "indeed, I am inclined to believe all that she told us—and something more."

"You think it possible she could have been in a sort of day-dream while she drew those awful things, thinking all the while she was draw-

ing a Christmas card?" I asked incredulously.

"*Ah bah,*" he returned as he kicked off his purple lizardskin slippers and leaped into bed, "what matters it what we think? Unless I am more mistaken than I think, we shall know with certitude before very long." And turning his back upon me, he buried his face in the pillow and dropped off to sleep.

I MIGHT have slept an hour, perhaps only a few minutes, when the sharp impact of an elbow against my ribs roused me. "Eh?" I demanded, sitting up in bed and rubbing my eyes sleepily.

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin's sharp whisper came through the darkness, "listen! Do you hear it?"

"Huh?" I responded, but:

"*Ps-s-st!*" he shut me off with a minatory hiss, and I held my peace, straining my ears through the chill November night.

At first I heard nothing but the skirling of the wind-fiends racing past the turreted walls, and the occasional creak of a rusty hinge as some door or shutter swung loose from its fastenings; then, very faint and far-away seeming, but growing in clarity as my ears became attuned to it, I caught the subdued notes of a piano played very softly.

"Come!" de Grandin breathed, slipping from the bed and donning a mauve-silk gown.

Obeying his summons, I rose and followed him on tiptoe across the balcony and down the stairs. As we descended, the music became clearer, more distinct. Someone was in the music room, touching the keys of the big grand piano with a delicate harpsichord touch. *Liebestraum* the composition was, and the gently struck notes fell, one after another, like drops of limpid water dripping from a moss-covered ledge into a quiet woodland pool.

"Why, it's exquisite," I began, but de Grandin's upraised hand cut short my commendation as he motioned me forward.

Seated on the bancal before the piano was Dunroe O'Shane, her long, ivory fingers flitting over the ivory keys, her loosened tawny hair flowing over her uncovered white shoulders like a spilth of molten bronze from a blast-furnace runner. From gently swelling breast to curving instep she was draped in a clinging shift of black-silk tissue which revealed the gracious curves of her pale body with a subtle glow, like a winter moon half seen through veils of banking storm-clouds.

As we paused at the doorway the dulcet German air came to an abrupt ending, the girl's fingers began weaving sinuous patterns over the keys, as though she would conjure up some nether-world spirit from their pallid smoothness, and the room was suddenly filled with a libidinous, macabre theme in B minor, beautiful and seductive, but revolting as a painted-face corpse already touched by the hand of putrefaction. Swaying gently to the rhythm of the frenetic music, she turned her face toward us, and I saw her eyes were closed, long lashes sweeping against white cheeks, pale, fine-veined lids calmly lowered.

"Why," I exclaimed softly, "why, de Grandin, she's asleep, she's——"

A quick movement of his hand stayed my words, as he stole softly across the rug-strewn floor, bent forward till his face was but a few inches from hers, and stared intently into her veiled eyes. I could see the small blue veins in his temples swell and throb, and the muscles of his throat bunch and contract with the physical effort he made to project his will into her consciousness. His thin, firm lips moved, forming soundless words, and one of his small, white hands rose slowly, finger-tips together, as though reeling thread from an invisible skein, paused a moment before her face, then

moved slowly back, with a gliding, stroking motion.

Gradually, with a slow diminuendo, the wicked, salacious tune came to a pause, died to a thin, vibrating echo, ceased. Still with lowered lids and gently parted lips, the girl rose from the piano, wavered uncertainly a moment, then walked from the room with a slow, gliding step, her slim, naked feet passing soundless as a drift of air over the tessellated floor. Slowly she mounted the stairs, one hand trailing gently on the carved baluster, the other raised with a sort of humble reverence to her bosom.

Silently, in a sort of breathless wonder, I watched her disappear around the curve of the stone stairway, and was about to hazard a wandering opinion when a sharp exclamation from the Frenchman silenced me.

"Quick, my friend," he ordered, extinguishing the tall twin candles which burned beside the piano, "let us go up. Unless I am more badly mistaken than I think, there is that up there which is worth seeing!"

I followed him up the stairs, down the first gallery to the second flight, and down the upper balcony to the bare, forbidding room Miss O'Shane used as studio. "Ah," he breathed as he struck a wax match and ignited the candles before the drawing-board, "did I not say it? *Parbleu*, Friend Trowbridge, Mademoiselle O'Shane has indulged in more than one sort of unconscious art this night, or Jules de Grandin is a liar!"

As the candle flames leaped to burning points in the still air of the room I started forward, then shrank back from the sketch their radiance revealed. Progress had been made on the picture since we had viewed it earlier in the evening. The hooded figure in the foreground was now clearly drawn, and it was no monk, but a steel-clad warrior with long white surtout drawn over his armor and a white hood pulled forward, half concealing his thin, bearded face. But there *was* a face there, where there had been none before—a thin, vulpine, wicked face with set, cruel eyes which gloated on the prostrate figure before him. The upraised arm which had no hand when Miss O'Shane showed us the drawing after dinner now terminated in a mailed fist, and between the steel-sheathed fingers it held the stem of a chalice, a lovely, tulip-shaped cup of crystal, as though it would scatter its contents to the polished stone with which the pictured room was paved. One other thing I noted before my glance shifted to the female figure—the long, red passion cross upon the white surtout was reversed, its long arm pointing upward, its transverse bar lowered, and even as I saw this I remembered vaguely that when knightly orders flourished it was the custom of heraldic courts thus to reverse a sir-knight's coat of arms when he was degraded from his chivalry as unworthy to maintain its traditions.

What had been the rough outlines of the manger were now firmly drawn into the representation of an altar, complete with crucifix and tabernacle, but veiling the cross, so lightly sketched that, stare as I would, I could not make it out, was an odd-shaped, winged form, somewhat resembling a bat with outstretched wings.

Before the altar's lowest step the female figure, now drawn with the detail of an engraving, groveled starkly, chin and breasts, knees and elbows, instep and wrists pressed tightly to the stones; open, suppliant hands stretched forward, palms upward; rippling masses of hair flowing forward, like a plume of smoke blown in the wind, and obscuring the face.

And what was that upon the second step leading to the sanctuary? At first I thought it an alms-basin, but a second glance showed me it was a wide, shallow dish, and in it rested a long, curve-bladed knife, such as I had seen French butchers wear in

their belts while enjoying a noonday smoke and resting for a space from their gory trade before the entrance of an abattoir.

"Good heavens!" I gasped, turning from the grisly scene with a feeling of physical sickness. "This is terrible, de Grandin! What are we going to do——?"

"*Barbe et tête de Saint Denis,* we do this!" he replied in a furious hissing voice. "*Parbleu,* shall Jules de Grandin be made a fool of twice in one night? Not if he knows it!"

Seizing a soap-rubber from the tray, he bent forward, and with half a dozen vigorous strokes reduced the picture to a meaningless smear of black and gray smudges.

"And now," he dusted his hands one against the other, as though to cleanse them of something foul, "let us to bed once more, my friend. I think we shall find something interesting to talk of tomorrow."

SHORTLY after breakfast next morning he found an excuse for separating Dunroe O'Shane from the rest of the company. "Will you not have pity on our loneliness, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked. "Here we lie, imprisoned in this great jail of a house, without so much as a radio program to cheer us through the morning hours. May we not trespass on your kindness and beg that you play for our delectation?"

"*I* play?" the girl answered with a half-incredulous smile. "Why, Dr. de Grandin, I don't know one note from another. I never played the piano in my life!"

"U'm?" He looked polite doubt as he twisted the ends of his mustache. "It is perhaps that I do not plead our cause fervently enough, *Mademoiselle?*"

"But truly, I can't play," she persisted.

"That's right, Dr. de Grandin," one of the young men chimed in. "Dunroe's a whiz at drawing, but she's absolutely tone-deaf. Can't carry a tune in a basket. I used to go to school with her, and they always used to give her a job passing out programs or selling tickets when the class chorus sang."

De Grandin shot me a quick glance and shook his head warningly.

"What does it mean?" I asked as soon as we were together once more. "She declares she can't play, and her friends corroborate her, but——"

"But stranger things have happened, and, *mordieu,* still stranger ones will happen again, or the presentiment which I have is nothing more than the consequences of a too-hearty breakfast!" he broke in with one of his quick, elfin smiles. "Let us play the silly fool, Friend Trowbridge; let us pretend to believe that the moon is composed entirely of green cheese and that mice terrorize the pussy-cat. So doing we shall learn more than if we attempt to appear filled with wisdom which we do not possess."

4

"OH, *I* know what let's do!" Miss Prettybridge, the lady of the scintillating teeth, whom de Grandin had squired to dinner the previous evening, exclaimed shortly after 10 o'clock that night. "This is such a wonderful, romantic old house—I'm sure it's just full of memories. Let's have a séance!"

"Fine, splendid, capital!" chorused a dozen voices. "Who'll be the medium? Anybody got a ouija board or a planchette table?"

"Order, order, please!" the self-constituted chairwoman rapped peremptorily on a bridge table with her lorgnette. "*I* know how to do it! We'll go into the dining-room and gather about the table. Then, when we've formed the mystic circle, if there are any spirits about we'll make 'em talk to us by rapping. Come on, everybody!"

"I don't think I like this," Miss O'Shane murmured as she laid her hand on my arm. Her usually pale face was paler still, and there was an expression of haunted fear in her big, gray-green eyes as she hesitated at the doorway.

"I don't care much for such nonsense myself," I admitted as we followed the others reluctantly into the refectory.

"Be close to me while this progresses, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered as he guided me to a seat beside him. "I care not much for this business of the monkey, but it may be the old she-fool yonder will serve our purpose unwittingly. The greatest danger is to Mademoiselle Dunroe. Keep watch on her."

The candles in the dining-room wall sconces were extinguished, and with Miss Prettybridge at the head of the table, the entire company was seated at the board, each one with his hands outspread on the dark, polished oak before him, his thumbs touching lightly, his little fingers in contact with those of his neighbors to right and left.

"Spirits," Miss Prettybridge, in her rôle of priestess, threw out the customary challenge, "spirits, if you are here tonight, signify your presence by rapping once on the table."

Thirty seconds or so elapsed without an answer to the lady's invitation. A woman half-way down the board tittered in half-hysterical embarrassment, and her neighbor silenced her with an impatient *sh-s-s-sh!* Then, distinctly as though thumped with a knuckle, the ancient table gave forth a resounding crack.

"If the spirit is a man, rap once; if a woman, twice," instructed Miss Prettybridge.

Another pause, somewhat longer, this time, then slowly, distinctly, two soft knocks from the very center of the table.

"Oh, a woman!" trilled one of the girls. "How perfectly thrilling!"

"And your name is—what?" demanded the mistress of ceremonies in a voice which trembled slightly in spite of her effort at control.

Thirteen slow, clear strokes sounded on the table, followed by one, then by eighteen, then others in series until nine distinct groups of blows were recorded.

"M-a-r-i-e-a-n-n-e—Marie Anne—a French girl!" exclaimed Miss Prettybridge. "Whom do you wish to speak with, Marie Anne? Rap when I come to the name as I call the roll. Dr. Trowbridge?"

No response.

"Dr. de Grandin?"

A sharp, affirmative knock answered her, and the visitant was bidden spell out her message.

Followed a rapid, telegraphic series of blows on the table, sometimes coming so quickly that it was impossible for us to decode them.

I listened as attentively as I could; so did everyone else, except Jules de Grandin. After a moment, during which his sleek blond head was thrust forward inquiringly, he turned his attention to Dunroe O'Shane.

The logs were burning low in the fireplace, but a shifting, flickering glow soaked through the darkness now and again, its red reflection lighting up the girl's face with a strange, unearthly illumination like the nimbus about the head of a saint in a mediæval painting.

I felt the Frenchman's fingers stiffen against mine, and realized the cause of his tenseness as I stole a fleeting glance at Miss O'Shane. Her eyes had closed, and her red, petulant lips were lightly parted, as though in sleep. Over her small, regular features had crept a look of longing ecstasy, like that of an hieromartyr breathless with adoration.

Even my limited experience with psychotherapy was sufficient to tell me she was in a condition verging on hypnosis, if not actually over the borderline of consciousness, and I was

about to leap from my seat with an offer of assistance when the insistent pressure of de Grandin's finger on mine held me back. Turning toward him, I saw his head nod sharply toward the doorway behind the girl, and following his silent bidding, I cast my glance into the passageway in time to see someone slip quickly and noiselessly down the hall.

For a moment I sat in wondering silence, debating whether I had seen one of the servants creep past or whether I was the victim of an optical illusion, when my attention was suddenly compelled to a second figure, then a third, a fourth and a fifth passing the archway's opening like flashes of light against a darkened wall. My reason told me my eyes were playing pranks, for the gliding, soundless figures filing in quick procession past the proscenium of the dining-room door were tall, bearded men encased in gleaming black steel, armed cap-à-pie, and shrouded from shoulder to spurs in voluminous sable cloaks.

I blinked my eyes and shook my head in bewilderment, wondering if I had fallen into a momentary doze and dreamed the vision, but sharply, with theatrical suddenness, there sounded the raucous, brazen bray of a bugle, the skirling squeal of an unoiled windlass reeling out rope, the thud of a drawbridge falling into place; then, above the whistling November wind there winded another trumpet flourish and the clatter of iron-shod hooves against stone paving-blocks.

"Why, what was that?" Miss Prettybridge forgot the spirit message still being thumped out on the table and threw back her head in momentary alarm.

"Sounds like a troop of scouts out for an evening's lark," put in our host, rising from the table. "Queer they should come out here to toot their bugles, though."

"Ha, *parbleu*, you say rightly, my friend," de Grandin broke in, rising so suddenly that his chair tilted back and fell to the floor with a resounding crash. "It is queer, most damnably queer. 'Boy Scouts' did you say? *Prie Dieu* they be not scouts of evil in search of some hapless little lad while a company of empty-headed fools sit idly by listening to the chatter of their decoy!

"Did none of you recognize the message the spirit had for me?"

We looked at him in silent astonishment as he lighted the wall-candles one after another and faced us with a countenance gone livid with fury.

"*Ah bah*, it is scarcely worth troubling to tell you," he cried, "but the important message the spirit had for me was a silly little nursery rime:

> "Great A, little a,
> Bouncing B.
> The cat's in the cupboard,
> And can't see me!

"No, *mordieu*, the cats might not see that accursed decoy spirit, but Jules de Grandin could see the others as they slunk past the door upon their devil's work! Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, look to Mademoiselle O'Shane, if you will."

Startled by his command, I turned round. Dunroe O'Shane had fallen forward across the table, her long, tawny hair freed from its restraining pins and lying about her head like a pool of liquid bronze. Her eyes were still closed, but the peaceful, longing expression had gone from her face, and in its stead was a look of unutterable fear and loathing.

"Take her up, some of you," de Grandin almost shrieked. "Bear her to her chamber and Dr. Trowbridge and I will attend to her. Then, Monsieur Van Riper, if you will be so good, I shall ask you to lend us one of your swiftest motor cars."

"A motor car—*now?*" Van Riper's incredulous tone showed he doubted his ears.

"*Précisément, Monsieur*, permit that I compliment you on the excel-

lence of your hearing," the Frenchman replied. "A swift motor car with plenty of fuel, if you please. There are certain medicines needed to attend this sickness of body and soul, and to strike directly at its cause, and we must have them without delay. Dr. Trowbridge will drive; you need not trouble your chauffeur to leave his bed."

TEN minutes later, having no more idea of our destination than I had of the underlying causes of the last half hour's strange events, I sped down the turnpike, Van Riper's powerful motor warming up with every revolution, and gaining speed with every foot we traveled.

"Faster, faster, *pour l'amour de Dieu,* my friend," the little Frenchman besought as we whirled madly around a banked curve in the road and started down the two-mile straightaway with the speedometer registering sixty-five miles an hour.

Twin disks of lurid flame rose above the crest of the gradient before us, growing larger and brighter every second, and the pounding staccato of high-powered motorcycles driven at top speed came to us through the shrieking wind.

I throttled down our engine to a legal speed as the State Troopers neared, but instead of rushing past they came to a halt, one on each side of us. "Where you from?" demanded the one to our left, on whose arm a sergeant's chevrons showed.

"From Mr. Van Riper's house—the Cloisters," I answered. "I'm Dr. Trowbridge, of Harrisonville, and this is Dr. de Grandin. A young lady at the house has been taken ill, and we're rushing home for medicine."

"Ump?" the sergeant grunted. "Come from th' Cloisters, do you? Don't suppose you passed anyone on the road?"

"No——" I began, but de Grandin leaned past me, peering intently into the constable's face.

"For whom do you seek, *mon sergent?*" he demanded.

"Night riders!" the words fairly spat from the policeman's lips. "Lot o' dam' kidnapers, sir. Old lady down th' road about five miles—name o' Stebbens—was walkin' home from a neighbor's with her grandson, a cute little lad about three years old, when a crowd o' bums came riding hell-bent for election past her, knocked her for a loop an' grabbed up the kid. Masqueraders they was—were long black gowns, she said, an' rode on black horses. Went away whoopin' an' yellin' to each other in some foreign language, an' laughin' like a pack o' dogs. Be God, they'll laugh outa th' other side o' their dirty mouths if we ketch 'em!

"Come on, Shoup, let's roll," he ordered his companion.

The roar of their motorcycles grew fainter and fainter as they swept down the road, and in another moment we were pursuing our way toward the city, gathering speed with every turn of the wheels.

5

WE HAD gone scarcely another mile before the slate-colored clouds which the wind had been piling together in the upper sky ripped apart and great clouds of soft, feathery snowflakes came tumbling down, blotting out the road ahead and cutting our speed to a snail's pace. It was almost graylight before we arrived at the outskirts of Harrisonville, and the snow was falling harder than ever as we headed up the main thoroughfare.

"*Hélas,* my friend, there is not the chance of the Chinaman that we can return to the Cloisters before noon, be our luck of the best," de Grandin muttered disconsolately; "therefore I suggest that we go to your house and obtain a few hours' rest. Me, I am almost frozen, and a

warm bed will be welcome as a kiss to a love-sick lad."

"But how about the medicine you wanted?" I objected. "Hadn't we better see about getting that first?"

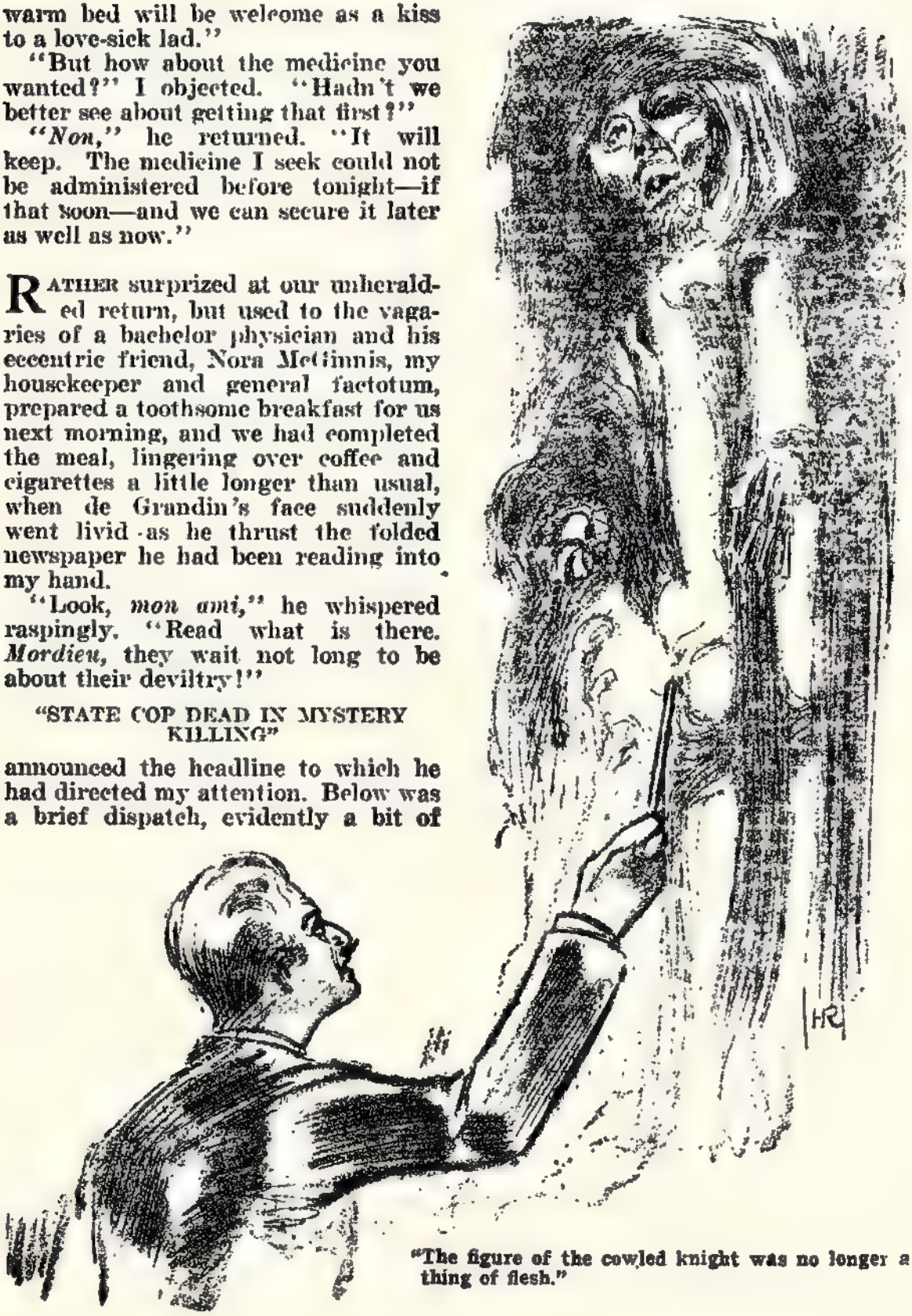
"*Non,*" he returned. "It will keep. The medicine I seek could not be administered before tonight—if that soon—and we can secure it later as well as now."

RATHER surprized at our unheralded return, but used to the vagaries of a bachelor physician and his eccentric friend, Nora McTinnis, my housekeeper and general factotum, prepared a toothsome breakfast for us next morning, and we had completed the meal, lingering over coffee and cigarettes a little longer than usual, when de Grandin's face suddenly went livid as he thrust the folded newspaper he had been reading into my hand.

"Look, *mon ami,*" he whispered raspingly. "Read what is there. *Mordieu,* they wait not long to be about their deviltry!"

"STATE COP DEAD IN MYSTERY KILLING"

announced the headline to which he had directed my attention. Below was a brief dispatch, evidently a bit of



"The figure of the cowled knight was no longer a thing of flesh."

last-minute news, sandwiched between the announcement of a sheriff's sale and a patent medicine advertisement:

Johnskill—Sergeant Rosswell of the state constabulary is dead and Private Shoup in a serious condition as the result of a battle with a mysterious band of masked ruffians near this place early this morning. Shortly after 10 o'clock last night Matilda Stebbens, of Osmondville, who was returning from a visit to a neighbor's with her three-year-old grandson, George, was attacked by a company of men mounted on black or dark-colored horses and enveloped in long black gowns, according to her story to the troopers. The leader of the gang struck her a heavy blow with a club or blackjack, evidently with the intention of stunning her, and seized the little boy, lifting him to his saddle. Had it not been for the fact that Mrs. Stebbens still affects long hair and was wearing a stiff felt hat, the blow would undoubtedly have rendered her unconscious, but as it was she was merely knocked into the roadside ditch without losing consciousness, and as she lay there, half stunned from the blow, she heard the kidnapers exchange several words in some foreign language, Italian, she thought, before they set out at a breakneck pace, giving vent to wild whoops and yells. The direction of their flight was toward this place, and as soon as she was able to walk, Mrs. Stebbens hobbled to the nearest telephone and communicated with the state police.

Sergeant Rosswell and Private Shoup were detailed to the case and started in pursuit of the abductors on their motorcycles, encountering no one along the road who would admit having seen the company of mysterious mounted gangsters. About two miles this side of the Cloisters, palatial country place of Tandy Van Riper, well-known New York financier, according to Trooper Shoup, he and his companion came upon the kidnapers, riding at almost incredible speed. Drawing their pistols, the state policemen called on the fleeing men to halt, and receiving no reply, opened fire. Their bullets, though fired at almost point-blank range, seemed to take no effect, Trooper Shoup declares, and the leader of the criminal band turned about and charged him and his companion, deliberately riding Sergeant Rosswell down. According to Shoup, a shot fired by Rosswell directly at the horse which was about to trample him took no effect, though the pistol was less than three feet from the beast's breast. Shoup is suffering from a broken arm, three fractured ribs and a severe bruise on the head, which, he alleges, was dealt him when one of the thugs struck him with the flat of a sword.

Physicians at Mercy Hospital believe Shoup's description of the criminals and the fight to be colored by the beating he received and intimate that he is not wholly responsible for his statements, as he positively declares that every member of the band of criminals was fully arrayed in black armor and armed with a long sword.

Working on the theory that the kidnapers are a band of Italian desperadoes who assumed this fantastic disguise, strong posses of state police are scouring the neighborhood. It is thought the little Stebbens boy was abducted by mistake, as the family are known to be in very moderate circumstances and the chances of obtaining a ransom for the lad are slight.

"You see?" de Grandin asked as I put the paper down with an exclamation of dismay.

"No, I'm hanged if I do," I shot back. "The whole gruesome business is beyond me. Is there any connection between what we saw at the Cloisters last night and——"

"*Mort d'un rat noir*, is there connection between the serpent and his venom—the Devil and the flames of hell?" he cried. "Yes, my friend, there is such a connection as will take all our skill and courage to break, I fear. Meantime, let us hasten, let us fly to the City Hospital. There is that there which shall prove more than a surprize to those vile miscreants, those forsworn servants of the Lord, when next we see them, *mon vieux*."

"What in the world are you talking about?" I demanded. "Whom do you mean by 'forsworn servants of the Lord'?"

"Ha, good friend," he returned, his face working with emotion, "you will know in due time, if what I suspect is true. If not——" He raised his narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug as he snatched his overcoat from the hall rack.

For upward of half an hour I cooled my heels in the frosty winter air while de Grandin was closeted in conference with the superintendent of the City Hospital, but when he came out he was wearing such a smile of serene happiness that I had not the heart to

berate him for leaving me outside so long.

"And now, kind friend, if you will take me so far as the pro-cathedral, I shall have done the last of my errands, and we may begin our journey to the Cloisters," he announced as he leaped nimbly into the seat beside me.

The Right Reverend De Motte Gregory, suffragan bishop of our diocese, was seated at his desk in the synod house as de Grandin and I were announced, and graciously consented to see us at once. He had been a more than ordinarily successful railway executive, a licensed legal practitioner and a certified public accountant before he assumed the cloth, and his worldly training had taught him the value of time and words, both his own and others', and rarely did he waste either.

"*Monsieur l' Évêque,*" de Grandin began after he had greeted the gray-haired cleric with a rigidly formal European bow, "in the garden of your beautiful church there grows a bush raised from a sprig of the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury—the tree which sprang from the staff of the blessed Joseph of Arimathea when he landed in Britain after his voyage and travail. *Monseigneur,* we are come to beg a so little spray of that shrub from you."

The bishop's eyes opened wide with surprize, but de Grandin gave him no time for reflection.

"*Monseigneur,*" he hurried on, "it is not that we wish to adorn our own gardens, nor yet to put it to a shameful commercial use, but we need it—need it most urgently in a matter of great importance which is toward——"

Leaving his chair he leaned across the bishop's wide rosewood desk and began whispering rapidly in the churchman's ear.

The slightly annoyed frown which mounted to the bishop's face as the little Frenchman took the liberty changed slowly to a look of incredulity, then to an expression of amazement. "You really believe this?" he asked at length.

"More, *Monseigneur,* I almost know it," de Grandin assured him earnestly, "and if I am mistaken, as I hope I am but fear I am not, the holy thorn can do no harm, while it may——" He paused, waving his hand in an expressive gesture.

Bishop Gregory touched one of the row of call-buttons on his desk. "You shall have the cutting from the tree, and be very welcome," he assured my friend, "but I join with you in the hope you are mistaken."

"*Grand merci, Monseigneur!*" de Grandin acknowledged with another bow. "*Mordieu,* but your great heart is equaled only by your massive intellect! Half the clergy would have said I raved had I told them one small quarter of what I related to you."

The bishop smiled a little wearily as he put the sprig of thorn-bush into de Grandin's hand. "Half the clergy, like half the laity, know so much that they know next to nothing," he replied.

"Name of a name," de Grandin swore enthusiastically as we turned toward the Cloisters, "and they say he is a worldly man! *Pardieu,* when will the foolish ones learn that the man who dedicates worldly wisdom to heaven's service is the most valuable servant of all?"

6

DUNROE O'SHANE was attired in a long, brown-linen smock and hard at work on her drawing when we arrived at the Cloisters shortly before luncheon. She seemed none the worse for her fainting fit of the previous night, and the company were rather inclined to rally de Grandin on the serious diagnosis he had made before rushing wildly away to secure medicine for her.

I was amazed at the good-natured manner in which he took their chaff-

ing, but a hasty whisper in my ear explained his self-control. "Apes' anger and fools' laughter are alike to be treated with scorn, my friend," he told me. "We—you and I—have work to do here, and we must not let the hum of pestilent gnats drive us from our purpose."

Bridge and dancing filled the evening from dinner to midnight, and the party broke up shortly after 12 with the understanding that all were to be ready to attend Thanksgiving services in the near-by parish church at 11 o'clock next morning.

"*Ts-s-st,* Friend Trowbridge, do not disrobe," de Grandin ordered as I was about to shed my dinner clothes and prepare for bed; "we must be ready for an instant sortie from now until cockcrow tomorrow, I fear."

"What's this all about, anyhow?" I demanded a little irritably, as I dropped on the bed and wrapped myself in a blanket. "There's been more confounded mystery here than I ever saw in a harmless old house, what with Miss O'Shane making funny drawings and throwing fainting-fits, and bugles sounding in the courtyard, and——"

"Ha, harmless, did you say?" he cut in with a grim smile. "My friend, if this house be harmless, then prussic acid is a healthful drink. Attend me with care, if you please. Do you know what this place is?"

"Certainly I do," I responded with some heat. "It's an old Cypriote villa brought to America and——"

"It was once a chapter house of the Knights of the Temple," he interrupted shortly, "and a Cyprian chapter house, at that. Does that mean nothing to you? Do you not know the Knights Templars, my friend?"

"I ought to," I replied. "I've been one for the last fifteen years."

"Oh, *là, là!*" he laughed. "You will surely slay me, my friend. You good, kind American gentlemen who dress in pretty uniforms and carry swords are no more like the old Knights of the Temple of Solomon than are these other good men who wear red tarbooshes and call themselves Nobles of the Mystic Shrine like the woman-stealing, pilgrim-murdering Arabs of the desert!

"Listen: The history of the Templars' order is a long one, but we can touch its high spots in a few words. Formed originally for the purpose of fighting the Infidel in Palestine and aiding poor pilgrims to the Holy City, they did yeomen service in the cause of God; but when Europe forsook its crusades and the Saracens took Jerusalem, the knights, whose work was done, did not disband. Not they. Instead they clung to their various houses in Europe, and grew fat, lazy and wicked in a life of leisure, supported by the vast wealth they had amassed from gifts from grateful pilgrims and the spoils of battle. In 1191 they bought the Isle of Cyprus from Richard I of England and established several chapter houses there, and it was in those houses that unspeakable things were done. Cyprus is one of the most ancient dwelling-places of religion, and of her illegitimate sister, superstition. It was there that the worshipers of Cytherea, goddess of beauty and of love—and other things less pleasant—had their stronghold. Before the Romans held the land it was drenched with unspeakable orgies. The very name of the island has passed into an invidious adjective in your language—do you not say a thing is Cyprian when you would signify it is lascivious? Certainly."

"Yes——"

"Hear me," he persisted, waving aside my interruption. "This Cytherea was but another form of Aphrodite, and Aphrodite, in turn, was but another name for the Eastern Goddess Astarte or Istar. You begin to comprehend? Her rites were celebrated with obscene debaucheries, but her worshipers became such human swine that only the most revolting inver-

sions of natural things would satisfy them. The flaunting and sacrifices of virtue were not enough; they must needs sacrifice—literally—those things which impersonated virtue—little, innocent children and chaste young maidens. Their foul altars must run red with the blood of innocence. These things were traditions in Cyprus long before the Knights Templars took up their abode there, and, as one can not sleep among dogs without acquiring fleas, so the knights, grown slothful and lazy, with nothing to do but think up ways of spending their time and wealth, became addicts to the evils of the earlier, heathen ways of their new home. Thoughts are things, my friend, and the evil thoughts of the old Cyprians took root and flourished in the brains of those unfortunate old warrior-monks whose hands were no longer busy with the sword and whose lips no longer did service to the Most High God.

"You doubt it? Consider: Though Philip IV and Clement V undoubtlessly did Jacques de Molay to death for no better reason than that they might cast lots for his raiment, the fact remains that many of the knights confessed to dreadful sacrileges committed in the chapter houses—to children slain on the altars once dedicated to God, to young virgins done to death amid horrid ceremonies, all in the name of the heathen goddess Cytherea.

"This very house wherein we sit was once the scene of such terrible things as those. About its stones must linger the presence of the evil men, the renegade priests of God, who once did them. These discarnate intelligences have lain dormant since the Fourteenth Century, but for some reason, which we will not now discuss, I believe they have wakened into physical beings once more. It was their reincarnated spirits we saw flitting past the door last night while Mademoiselle Dunroe lay in a trance; it was they who took the little boy from his grandmother's arms; it was they who slew the brave policeman; it is they who will soon attempt to perform the hideous inversion of the mass, unless I am mistaken."

"See here, de Grandin," I expostulated, "there have been some deucedly queer goings-on here, I'll admit, but when you try to tell me that a lot of old soldier-monks have come to life again and are traipsing around the countryside stealing children, you're piling it on a bit too thick, you know. Now, if there were any evidence to prove that——"

"Silence!" his sharp whisper brought me up with a start as he rose from his chair and crept, catlike, toward the door, opening it a crack and glancing down the darkened corridor outside. Then:

"Come, my friend," he bade in a low breath, "come and see what I behold."

As he swung the door back I glanced down the long, stone-paved gallery, dark as Erebus save as cancellated bars of moonlight shot obliquely down from the tiny mullioned windows piercing the dome, and made out a gliding, wraithlike figure in trailing white garments.

"Dunroe O'Shane!" I murmured dazedly, watching the retreating form slipping soundlessly down the dark balcony. The wavering light of the candle she bore in her upraised hand cast gigantic shadows against the carved balustrade and the sculptured uprights of the interlaced arches supporting the gallery above, and hobgoblin shades seemed to march along beside her like an escort of unclean genii from the legions of Eblis. I watched open-mouthed with amazement as she slipped down the passage, her feet, obscured in a haze of trailing draperies, treading noiselessly, her free hand stretched outward toward the balcony rail. Next moment the gallery was deserted; abruptly as a motion picture fades from the screen when the projecting light winks out,

Dunroe O'Shane and her flickering rushlight vanished from our sight.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," the Frenchman whispered, "after her—it was through that further door she went!"

Quietly as possible we ran down the gallery, paused before a high, pointed-topped door and wrenched at its wrought-iron handle. The stout oaken panels held firm, for the door was latched on the farther side.

"Ten thousand little red devils!" de Grandin cried in vexation. "We are stalemated!"

For a moment I thought he would hurl himself against the four-inch planks of the door in impotent fury, but he collected himself with an effort, and drawing a flashlight from his jacket pocket, handed it to me with the command, "Hold the light steady on the keyhole, my friend." The next instant he sank to his knees, produced two short lengths of thin steel wire and began methodically picking the lock.

"Ha," he exclaimed as he rose and dusted the knees of his trousers, "those old ones built for strength, Friend Trowbridge, but they knew little of subtlety. Little did that ancient locksmith dream his handiwork would one day meet with Jules de Grandin."

The unbarred door swung inward beneath his touch, and we stepped across the stone sill of a vast, dungeon-dark apartment.

"*Mademoiselle?*" he called softly. "Mademoiselle Dunroe — are you here?"

He shot the searching beam of his flashlight hither and yon about the big room, disclosing high walls of heavy carved oak, massive pieces of mediæval furniture—a great canopy-bed, several cathedral chairs and one or two massive, iron-bound chests—but found no living thing.

"*Mordieu*, but this is strange!" he muttered, sinking to his knees to flash his light beneath the high-carved bed. "Into this room she did most certainly come but a few little minutes ago, gliding like a spirit," he insisted, "and now, *pouf*, out of this same room she does vanish like a ghost! *C'est très étrange!*"

Though somewhat larger, the room was similar to most other bedchambers in the house, paneled with rather crudely carved, age-blackened wood for the entire height of its walls, ceiled with great beams which still bore the marks of the adz, and floored with octagonal marble tiles of alternate black and white. We went over every inch of it, searching for some secret exit, for, save the one by which we had entered, there was no door in the place, and the two great windows were of crude, semi-transparent glass let into metal frames securely cemented to the surrounding stones. Plainly, nobody had left the room that way.

At the farther end of the apartment stood a tall wardrobe, elaborately decorated with carved scenes of chase and battle. Opening one of the double doors letting into the press, de Grandin inspected the interior, which, like the outside, was carved in every available place. "U'm?" he commented, surveying the walls carefully under his flashlight. "It may be that this is but the anteroom to —*ha!*"

He broke off, pointing dramatically to a carved group in the center of one of the back panels. It represented a procession of hunters returning from their sport, deer, boar and other animals lashed to long poles which the huntsmen bore shoulder-high. The men were filing through the arched entrance to a castle, the great doors of which swung back to receive them. One of the door-leaves, apparently, had warped loose from the body of the plank from which it was carved, for it swung loose a full quarter-inch.

"*C'est très adroit, n'est-ce-pas?*" my companion asked with a delight-

ed grin. "Had I not seen such things before, it might have imposed on me. As it is——"

Reaching forward, he gave the loosened door a sharp, quick push, and the entire back of the wardrobe slipped upward like a sliding window-sash, revealing a narrow opening.

"And what have we here?" de Grandin asked, playing his spotlight through the secret doorway.

Straight ahead for three or four feet ran a flagstone sill, worn smooth in the center, as though with the shuffling tread of many feet. Beyond that began a flight of narrow, stone stairs which spiraled steeply down a shaft like the flue of a monster chimney.

De Grandin turned to me, and his little, heart-shaped face was graver than I had ever seen it. Though his tightly waxed mustache twitched and quivered at the points like the whiskers of an irritable tom-cat, his eyes were without the customary glitter which illuminated them when he was excited. "Trowbridge, dear, kind friend," he said in a voice so low and hoarse I could scarcely make out his words, "we have faced many perils together—perils of spirit and perils of flesh—and always we have triumphed. This time we may not. If I do not mistake rightly, there lies below these steps an evil more ancient and potent than any we have hitherto met. I have armed us against it with the weapons of religion and of science, but—I do not know that they will avail. Say, then, will you turn back now and go to your bed? I shall think no less of you, for no man should be compelled to face this thing unknowingly, and there is now no time to explain. If I survive, I shall return and tell you all. If I come not back with daylight, know that I have perished in my failure, and think kindly of me as one who loved you deeply. Will you not now say *adieu*, old friend?" He extended his hand, and though it was steady at the wrist, I saw the long, smooth-jointed fingers were trembling with suppressed nervousness.

"I will *not!*" I returned hotly, stung to the quick by his suggestion. "I don't know what's down there, but if you go, I go too!"

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" he swore exultantly, and before I realized what he was about, he had flung his arms about my neck and kissed me on both cheeks. "Onward, then, brave comrade!" he cried. "This night we fight such a fight as has not been waged since the sainted George slew the monster!"

7

ROUND and round a steadily descending spiral, while I counted a hundred and seventy steps, we went, going deeper and deeper through inky blackness. Finally, when I had begun to grow giddy with the endless corkscrew turns, we arrived at a steeply sloping tunnel, floored with smooth black-and-white tiles. Down this we hastened, the pitch of the floor adding to our speed, until we had traversed a distance of perhaps a hundred feet; then for a similar length we trod a level path, and at last began an ascent as steep as the first decline had been.

"Careful—cautiously, my friend," the Frenchman warned in a whisper as the darting beam of his searchlight disclosed a heavy, iron-bound door before us.

Pausing a moment while he fumbled in the pocket of his jacket, my companion strode toward the barrier and laid his left hand on its heavy, wrought-iron latch.

The portal swung back almost as he touched it, and:

"*Qui va là?*" challenged a voice from the darkness.

De Grandin threw the ray of his torch across the doorway, disclosing a tall, spare form in gleaming black plate-armor over which was drawn the brown-serge habit of a monk. The sentry wore his hair in a sort of bob

approximating the haircut affected by children today, and on his sallow immature face sprouted the rudiments of a straggling beard. It was a youthful face and a weak one which de Grandin's light disclosed, but the face of a youth already well schooled in viciousness—such a face as I had seen on juvenile gang-recruits during a brief term of duty as relief to the physician of our city prison.

"*Qui vive?*" the fellow called doubtfully in a rather high, effeminate voice, laying a hand on the hilt of a heavy broadsword dangling from the wide, brass-studded baldric looped over his cassock.

"Those on the service of the Most High God, *petit bête!*" returned de Grandin, drawing something (a pronged sprig of wood, I thought) from his jacket pocket and thrusting it toward the warder's face.

"*Ohé!*" cried the other sharply, shrinking back as though from contact with a white-hot iron. "Touch me not, good messires, I pray—I——"

"Ha—so?" de Grandin gritted between his teeth, and drew the branched stick downward across the sentry's face.

Astonishingly, the youth seemed to shrink and shrivel in upon himself. Trembling as though with an ague, he bent forward, buckled at the knees, fell toward the floor, and—was gone! Sword, armor, cassock and the man who wore them dwindled to nothingness before our sight like a fleck of carbon dioxide snow melting away and leaving neither smudge of dampness nor grain of residue in the place where it had been.

A hundred feet or so farther on, our way was barred by another door, wider, higher and heavier than the first. While no tiler guarded it, it was so firmly locked that all our efforts were powerless to budge it.

"Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin announced, "it seems we shall have to pick this lock, even as we did the other. Do you keep watch through yonder grille while I make the way open for us." Reaching up, he moved aside a shutter covering a barred peep-hole in the door's thick panels; then, dropping to his knees, drew forth his wires and began working at the lock which held the barrier in place.

Gazing through the tiny wicket, I beheld a chapel-like room of circular formation, cunningly floored with slabs of polished yellow stone, inlaid with occasional plaques of purple, so that the pavement appeared splashed with coagulated blood.

By the glow of a wavering vigil lamp and the flicker of several guttering ecclesiastical candles, I saw the place was roofed with a vaulted ceiling supported by a number of converging arches, and the pier of each arch was supported by the carved image of a huge human foot which rested on the crown of a hideous, half-human head, crushing it downward and causing it to grimace hellishly with mingled pain and fury.

Beyond the yellow sanctuary lamp loomed the altar, approached by three low steps, and on it was a tall wooden crucifix from which the *corpus* had been stripped and to which had been nailed, in obscure caricature, a huge black bat. The staples fastening the poor beast to the cross must have hurt unmercifully, for it strove hysterically to free itself, fluttering its pinioned wings and whimpering and gibbering piteously.

Almost sickened at the sight, I described the scene to de Grandin as he worked at the lock, speaking in a muted whisper, for, though there was no sign of living thing save the tortured bat, I felt instinctively that there were listening ears concealed in the darkness beyond the violated altar.

"Good—*très bon!*" he grunted as he hastened with his task. "It may be we are yet in time, good friend." Even as he spoke there came a sharp click, and the door's heavy bolts

slipped back under the pressure of his improvised picklock.

Slowly, inch by careful inch, lest the squeak of an unoiled hinge betray us, we forced the great door back.

But even as we did so, there came from the rear of the circular chamber the subdued measures of a softly intoned Gregorian chant, and something white moved forward through the shadows.

It was a man arrayed in black-steel armor over which was drawn a white surtout emblazoned with a reversed passion cross, and in his hands he bore a wide-mouthed brazen bowl like an alms-basin. In the tray rested a wicked-looking, curve-bladed knife.

With a mocking genuflection to the altar he strode up the steps and placed his burden on the second tread; then, with a coarse guffaw, he spat upon the pinioned bat and backed downward, taking station to the left of the sanctuary and looking expectantly over his shoulder into the shadows beyond.

As at a signal a double file of armored men came marching out of the gloom, ranged themselves in two ranks, one to right, one to left of the altar, and whipped their long swords from their sheaths, clashing them together, tip to tip, forming an arcade of flashing steel between them.

So softly that I felt, rather than heard him, de Grandin sighed in suppressed fury as blade met blade and two more men-at-arms, each bearing a smoking censer, strode forward beneath the roof of steel. The perfume of the incense was strong, acrid, sweet, yet bitterly revolting at the same time, and it mounted to our brains like the fumes of some accursed Oriental drug. But even as we sniffed its seductive scent, our eyes widened at sight of the form which paced slowly behind the mailed acolytes.

Ceremoniously, step by pausing step, she came, like a bride marching under the arbor of uplifted swords at a military wedding, and my eyes fairly ached at the beauty of her. Milk-white, lissom and pliant as a peeled willow wand, clad only in the jeweled loveliness of her own pearly whiteness, long, bronze hair sweeping in a cloven tide from her pale brow and cataracting over her tapering shoulders, came Dunroe O'Shane. Her eyes were closed, as though in sleep, and on her red, full lips lay the yearning half-smile of the bride who ascends the aisle to meet her bridegroom, or the novice who mounts the altar steps to make her full profession. And as she advanced, her supple, long-fingered hands waved slowly to and fro, weaving fantastic arabesques in the air like the sinuous patterns woven out of nothingness by Eastern fakirs when they would lay a charm on their beholders.

"Hail, Cytherea, Queen and Priestess and Goddess; hail, She Who Confers Life and Being on Her Servants!" came the full-throated salutation of the double row of armored men as they clashed their blades together in martial salute, then dropped to one knee in greeting and adoration.

For a moment the undraped priestess paused below the altar stairs; then, as though forced downward by invincible pressure, she dropped, and we heard the smacking impact of soft, white flesh against the stone floor as she flung herself prostrate and beat her brow and hands against the floor in utter self-abasement before the marble altar and its defiled calvary.

"Is all prepared?" The question rang out sonorously as a cowled figure advanced from the shadows and strode with a swaggering step to the altar.

"All is prepared!" the congregation answered with one voice.

"Then bring the paschal lamb, even the lamb without fleece!" The deep-voiced command somehow sent shivers of horror racing down my spine.

Two armored votaries slipped quietly away, returning in an instant

with the struggling body of a little boy between them—a chubby little baby boy, naked as when his mother first saw him, who fought and kicked and offered such resistance as his puny strength allowed while he called aloud to "Mamma" and "Grandma" to save him from his captors.

Down against the altar steps the butchers flung the little man; then one took his chubby, dimpled hands in relentless grip while the other drew backward at his ankles, suspending him above the wide-mouthed brazen bowl reposing on the second step.

"Take up the knife. Priestess and Queen of goodly Salamis," the hooded master of ceremonies commanded. "Take up the sacrificial knife, that the red blood may flow to our Goddess, and we hold high wassail in Her honor! O'er land and sea, o'er burning desert and heaving billow have we journeyed——"

"Villains—assassins—renegades!" Jules de Grandin bounded from his station in the shadow like a frenzied cat springing to the attack and faced them in snarling defiance. "By the blood of all the blessed martyrs, you have journeyed altogether too far from hell, your home!"

"Ha? Interlopers?" rasped the hooded man. "So be it. Three hearts shall smoke upon our altar instead of one!"

"*Parbleu,* nothing shall smoke but the fires of your endless torture as your foul carcasses burn ceaselessly in hell!" de Grandin returned, leaping forward and drawing out the forked stick with which he had struck down the porter at the outer gate.

A burst of contemptuous laughter greeted him. "Thinkest thou to overcome *me* with such a toy?" the cowled one asked between shouts. "My warder at the gate succumbed to your charms—he was a poor weakling, unschooled in the service of the olden ones. Him you have passed, but not me. Now die!"

From beneath his cassock he snatched a long, two-handed sword, whirled its blade aloft in a triple flourish, and struck directly at de Grandin's head.

Almost by a miracle, it seemed, the Frenchman avoided the blow, dropped his useless sprig of thornwood and snatched a tiny, quill-like object from his pocket. Dodging the devastating thrusts of the enemy with the nimbleness of a panther, de Grandin toyed an instant with the capsule in his hand, unscrewed the cap from its end, and, suddenly changing his tactics, advanced directly on his foe.

"Ha, *Monsieur* from the Fires, here is fire you know not of!" he shouted, thrusting forward the queer-looking rod and advancing fearlessly within reach of the other's flashing sword.

I stared in open-mouthed amazement. Poised for another slashing blow with his great sword, the armed man wavered momentarily, while an expression of astonishment, bewilderment, finally craven fear overspread his lean, predatory features. Lowering his sword, he thrust feebly with the point, but there was no force behind the stab; the deadly steel seemed to drop of its own weight in his hands and fell with a jangling clatter to the floor before he could drive it into the little Frenchman's breast.

The hooded man seemed growing thinner; his tall, spare form, which had bulked a full head taller than de Grandin a moment before, seemed losing substance—growing gradually transparent, like an early-morning fog slowly dissolving before the strengthening rays of the rising sun. Behind him, *through* him, I could dimly espy the outlines of the violated altar and the prostrate woman before its steps. Now the objects in the background became plainer and plainer. The figure of the armored man was no longer a thing of flesh and blood and cold steel overspread with a monk's habit, but an unsubstantial phantom, like an oddly shaped cloud. It was composed of trailing, rolling

clouds of luminous vapor which gradually disintegrated into strands and floating webs of phosphorescence, and these, in turn, gave way to scores of little nebulæ of light which glowed like cigarette-ends of intense blue radiance. Then, where the nebulæ had been were only dancing, shifting specks of bright blue fire, finally nothing but a few pin-points of light; then —nothing.

Like shadows thrown by forest trees when the moon is at her zenith, the double row of men-at-arms stood at ease while de Grandin battled with their champion; now, their leader gone, they turned with one accord and scuttled in panic flight toward the rearward shadows, but Jules de Grandin was after them like a hawk harrying a flight of sparrows.

"Ha, *Messieurs les Renégats,*" he called mockingly, pressing closer and closer, "you who steal away helpless little boy-babies from the arms of their *grand'mères* and then would sacrifice them on your altar, do you like the feast Jules de Grandin brings? You who would make wassail with the blood of babes—drink the draft I have prepared! Fools, mockers at God, where now is your deity? Call on her—call on Cytherea! *Pardieu,* I fear her not, neither her nor the forsworn servants of the Lord who kiss her feet in homage!"

As it was with the master, so it was with the underlings: Closer and closer de Grandin pressed against the struggling mass of demoralized men, and their very bodies seemed to melt before his advance like ice when pressed upon by red-hot iron. One moment they milled and struggled, shrieking and mouthing obscene prayers for aid to some unclean deity; the next they were dissolved into nebulous vapor, drifting aimlessly a moment in the still air of the chapel, then swept away to nothingness.

"And so, my friend, that is done," announced de Grandin matter-of-factly as he might have mentioned the ending of a meal. "There crouches Mademoiselle O'Shane, Friend Trowbridge; come, let us seek her clothes—they should be somewhere here."

Behind the altar we found Dunroe's nightrobe and negligée lying in a ring, just as she had shrugged out of them before taking up her march between the upraised swords. Gently as a nurse attending a babe, the little Frenchman raised the swooning girl from her groveling posture before the altar, draped her robes about her, and took her in his arms.

A wailing cry, rising gradually to an incensed roar, echoed and reverberated through the vaulted chamber, and de Grandin thrust the unconscious girl into my hands. "*Mon Dieu,*" he exclaimed with a serio-comic expression of dismay, "I did forget. *Le petit garçon!*"

Crouched as close to the wall as he could get, we found the little lad, tears of surprizing size streaming down his fat cheeks as his little mouth opened wide and emitted wail after broken-hearted wail. "*Holà,* my little cabbage, *mon brave soldat!*" de Grandin soothed him, stretching out his hands to the weeping youngster. "Come with me. Come, we shall clothe you warmly against the cold and pop you into a bed of feathers, and tomorrow morning, ere we return you to your mother's arms, we shall fill your little belly to the bursting-point with bonbons—may the devil roast me on a spit if we do not so!"

PANTING under my burden, for she was no light weight, I bore Dunroe O'Shane up the long, tortuous flight of steps down which de Grandin and I had come a short half-hour before, pausing every now and again to regain my breath.

"Morphine is indicated here, if I do not mistake," de Grandin remarked as we laid the girl on her bed and drew the covers up about her chin.

"But we haven't any——" I be-

gan, only to be checked by his grin.

"Oh, but we have," he contradicted. "I foresaw something like this was likely to come about, and abstracted a quantity of the drug, together with a syringe, from your surgery before we left home."

When we had administered the narcotic, we set out for our own chamber, the little boy, warmly bundled in blankets, held tightly in de Grandin's arms. At a nod from the Frenchman we paused at Dunroe's studio, lighted several candles and inspected her work. Fairly spread upon her drawing-board was a pretty little scene—a dimpled little boy crowing and smiling in his mother's lap, a proud and happy father leaning over them, and in the foreground a group of rough bucolics kneeling in smiling adoration. "Why, the influence, whatever it was, seems to have left her before we went down those secret stairs!" I exclaimed, looking admiringly at the drawing.

"Do you say so?" de Grandin asked in an odd voice as he bent closer to inspect the picture. "Look here, if you please, my friend."

Bringing my eyes within a few inches of the board on which the Christmas scene was sketched, I saw, so faint it was hardly to be found unless the beholder looked for it, another picture, lightly sketched in jerky, uneven lines, depicting another scene—a vaulted chapel with walls lined by armed men, two of whom held a child's body horizontally before the altar, while a woman, clothed only in her long, trailing hair, plunged a wicked, curve-bladed knife into the little one's body, piercing the heart, and the blood dripped into a wide-mouthed brazen bowl beneath.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, starting back in horror.

"Precisely," agreed Jules de Grandin. "The good Lord inspired talent in the poor girl's hand, but the powers of darkness dictated that sketch. Perhaps—I can not say for sure—she drew both the pictures we see here, and the good one was formerly the faint one, but when I overcame the wicked ones, the wicked scene faded to insignificance and the pleasing one became predominant. It is possible, and—*nom d'un nom!*"

"What now?" I demanded as he turned a conscience-smitten face toward me and thrust the sleeping child into my arms.

"*La chauve-souris*—the bat!" he exclaimed. "I did forget the poor one's sufferings in the stress of greater things. Take the little man to our room, and soothe him, my friend. Me, I go down those ten-thousand-times-damned stairs to that never-enough-to-be-cursed chapel and put the poor brute out of its misery!"

"You mean you're actually going into that horrible place again?" I demanded incredulously.

"*Eh bien*, why not?" he asked.

"Why — those terrible men — those——" I began, but he stopped me with upraised hand.

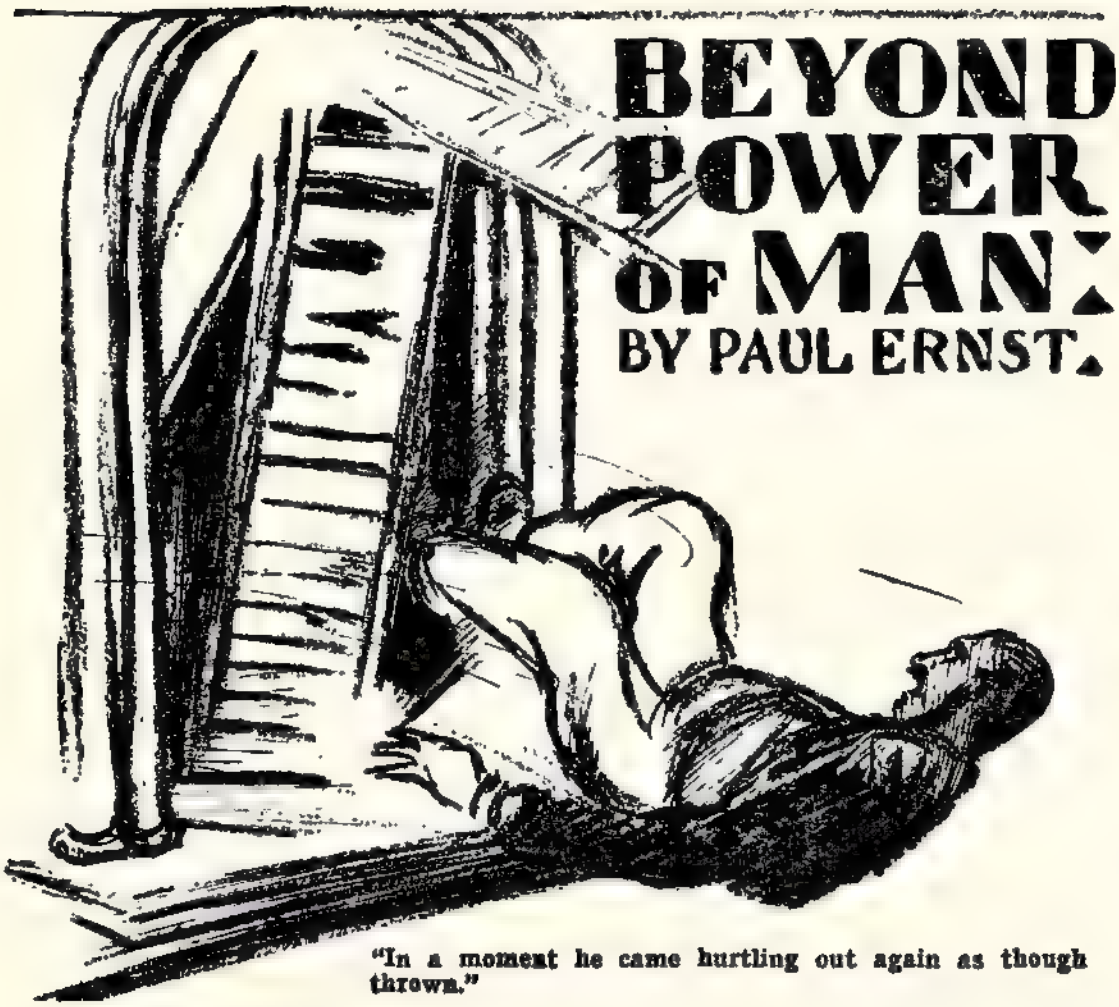
"My friend," he asked as he extracted a cigarette from his dressing-gown pocket and lighted it nonchalantly, "have you not yet learned that when Jules de Grandin kills a thing —be it man or be it devil—it is dead? There is nothing there which could harm a new-born fly, I do solemnly assure you."

8

JULES DE GRANDIN poured out a couple of tablespoonfuls of brandy into a wide-mouthed glass and passed the goblet under his nose, sniffing appreciatively at the liquor's rich bouquet. "Not at all, *cher ami*," he denied with a wave of his slender, womanish hand. "From the first I did suspect there was something not altogether right about that house.

"To begin, you will recall that on the night Monsieur Van Riper took us from the station he told us his progenitor had imported the house,

(Continued on page 860)



BEYOND POWER OF MAN

BY PAUL ERNST

"In a moment he came hurtling out again as though thrown."

THE Brandsted Institute experts thought the fossilized thigh-bone and skull to be the remains of some enormous, hitherto unknown ape that had lived in the time of the dinosaur when life was cast in a heroic mold. The professors of Ambridge pointed out the high dome of the cranium and the unmistakably human tooth, and insisted that the creature had been a full-fledged man, possessed of nearly as much intelligence as the lower orders of present-day savages. The controversy that followed filled all the Sunday supplements and nearly caused some dislocations in the scientific world.

In only one point were the debaters agreed. This was—the size. Intricate calculations based on microscopic examination of the fossil fragments revealed that the creature, whether man or ape, had stood nearly eleven feet high. Also the structure of the thigh-bone indicated immense weight carried and enormous muscular activity.

And so, on the combined professorial canvas, there grew into being a shadowy picture of something that had once walked on two legs like a man, that was stronger than any ten men as we know them today, and that weighed between eight hundred and eight hundred and fifty pounds.

Shortly after the precious fragments had been unearthed, Dr. Wayne Early took a train from the city and went to the scene of the

discovery. Dr. Early was not precisely a fossil expert. His knowledge of that fascinating subject was shallow indeed compared to the knowledge of the Brandsted and Ambridge authorities. But he had an enthusiasm for poking about with a geologist's hammer; he needed a short vacation anyway; and the locality sounded interesting. The skull and thigh-bone were under glass at the Brandsted Institute, of course, so there was nothing left to see at the original pit, unless—and at the thought he was coldly excited—a patient searcher might unearth more fragments. . . .

The owner of the land, a prosperous man who had several farm holdings around the suddenly famous village, greeted the doctor with easy hospitality and friendly respect. At his guest's persistent failure to find more fossils he wagged his head sympathetically; and when he advanced his unfortunate suggestion it may have been that, in addition to hope of financial profit for himself, he honestly thought he might be making up for the doctor's disappointment in past mysteries by offering him one engendered in the present.

Anyway he began to tell him of the adjoining farm, which he owned and was unable either to sell or lease because of the reputation of the farmhouse. And the doctor, a little put out at his failure to find more bones, though he had been reasonably sure before he started that nothing would have been overlooked by the Brandsted men, answered him rather bruskly.

"But there really is something wrong with the house!" the man insisted.

The doctor smiled bleakly. "Of course. There's something wrong with all haunted houses—in people's minds, at least."

"But not in the mind of science, eh? Science doesn't approve of ghosts?"

"There are no ghosts known to science."

"Nevertheless there's something in that old house. And I thought you might enjoy a few hours of scientific investigating."

The doctor twiddled his fingers, remembered the kindness his host had shown him, and finally spoke more patiently than he had at first intended. "What do you think inhabits the place—the usual spirit of someone murdered there in the past, I suppose?"

"No, nothing ordinary like that. It's no human spirit, at least not a common one. It's something enormous, something no one has run up against before, that I've ever heard of."

"Have you seen it?"

"No—but I've felt it!"

"And what was the experience like?" prodded the doctor, after a long pause which the other seemed reluctant to break.

"It was like being mauled by a giant's hand. Whatever thing lives there is enormous, I tell you.

"When I first came here with a little money to invest and bought this land I noticed the farm next door. It was abandoned, the only place around here that wasn't being worked, so I inquired at the bank and found it was for sale. The price was so low that I got curious, and after I pressed him to it, the cashier explained that the house was supposed to be haunted and that the owner had left the country after placing it in the bank's hands to sell at a low figure. Of course I bought it. The land was good, and I didn't take much stock in fairy-stories where dollars and cents were concerned.

"Afterward I walked over to inspect my new property. It was in broad daylight, shortly after noon. Without thinking much about the

story of the cashier, I climbed the fence and jumped from the top rail to the ground. The moment my feet hit the turf, I was knocked flat!"

"Knocked? You must have tripped over something," suggested the doctor.

"That's possible. In fact that's what I told myself at the time, although my chest hurt as though it had been hit with a club. Anyway I walked on toward the house. As I went I thought I felt a faint stir of air as though somebody had brushed rapidly past me, intent on getting into the place before I did. However, that may have been the wind, too faint to wave the grass, but strong enough to be felt.

"There was one window open—the rest were closed with shutters—and I walked toward this, thinking to enter the house that way. I never followed that plan! Just as I reached the window I was knocked down again. There was no mistake about this, no possible excuse. I was bowled over by a tangible force, as though hit by an immense hand opened flat. For a time I lost consciousness. When I came to, I found myself outside the fence with my right shoulder dislocated. I don't know whether this was from the fall—I must have been thrown bodily over the top rail—or whether the same hand that knocked me down wrenched my shoulder afterward.

"I had my shoulder set and went to see the cashier and get the rest of the story about my new house—the story I hadn't bothered to listen to before. . . .

"Up until a few years before I bought it, the cashier knew nothing definite except that it had been vacant beyond the memory of the oldest resident. Then it had been purchased by a city man who came down for a visit and was attracted by the price. He sent in to the city for workmen—no one in the village would go near the place—and gave orders to tear the old building down. When they arrived, ignorant of the whole affair, they went carelessly in and made ready for their wrecking job. The foreman knocked one of the shutters in and climbed through the window.

"In an instant he came hurtling out again as though he had been thrown. The clothes were torn nearly off his body, and he was black and blue from head to foot. He was so scared he couldn't say a word, just hurdled the fence and ran toward the railway station, with his men following more slowly but determined never to touch the place again. And next day the owner put the property in the bank's hands for sale and went home."

The doctor lit a cigarette. "Probably some tramps have squatted there and mean to frighten away everyone so they'll have a secure home. That's usually the way these old houses are haunted."

"Perhaps," shrugged his host.

"But you don't think so?" the doctor laughed at his dubious tone of voice.

"No, I don't. I think it's something more dangerous than any tramp. I think——" For a moment he hesitated as though he were almost ashamed to say what he had in mind; then, "I think those old bones the scientific men found on my property here have something to do with it. That big ape, or missing link, or whatever it was."

The doctor stared. "Well, you're making it good while you're at it!" he exclaimed. "A ghost half a million years old! Really!"

"It might be that and it might not be," was the stubborn answer. "Anyway, whatever is there is bigger than any man ever was."

With a yawn the doctor hinted that he was ready for bed. "Very interesting," he said indifferently.

"Then you don't care to investigate?"

"I think not. The place is old and probably damp, and I don't feel like risking a cold for so slight a reason."

The other looked speculatively at him. "It's not so slight to me," he said. "I'm losing good money by not being able to rent or sell. And I'd be willing to pay five hundred dollars cash to anyone who can lay my ghost. But, come to think of it, I don't believe you'd be the right one to tackle the job anyway. You're not very big, and you're kind of sensitive and high-strung. . . ."

The doctor was not so wealthy that he could afford to refuse five hundred dollars without thinking twice about it. Also the reference to his stature might have stung. No small man likes to be reminded of his size. So he lost some of his indifference.

"What would be necessary to convince the country that the place isn't haunted?" he asked.

"Oh, spend a night there. Or a day, if you like. No, come to think of it, a night would be better."

"And I presume you want me to enter just at midnight and carry only a candle, and all the rest of it?"

"Oh, no. Go in at any time you please and carry all the light you can take. There's no gas or electricity there, of course, and I'd suggest a lantern and my electric flashlight. A candle, too. No use running foolish risks."

"And for one night you'll pay me five hundred dollars?"

"With the greatest of pleasure!"

For an instant the doctor lost some of his chill air of professionalism and almost grinned. "I'll go tonight," he said. "Now!"

"Right," agreed his host, and the bargain was sealed.

The rest of the story—some of it almost too incoherent to be rendered intelligible—was penned by the doctor's own hand. The manuscript was found in the big old tile stove that had occupied a corner of the ancient parlor. These papers were so charred that extreme care had to be exercised in handling them, but they were found to be complete down to the last word the doctor had written. How they came to be in the stove is only one of the minor mysteries of the case.

Here is the doctor's story:

This is certainly a brainless undertaking. I am a scientist with acknowledged successes to my credit in the fields of medicine, biology and psychology. I am forty-two years old and supposedly possessed of mature judgment. I should know better. Yet here I sit, at 10 o'clock at night, perched uncomfortably on a rickety old stool, writing on a battered table, with only the light from a very shaky and infirm lantern. It is ridiculous. I only hope my friends never hear of it.

The whole reason for my being here, of course, is financial. Fancy a man paying five hundred dollars for one night spent in a vacant house! Only a fool or a millionaire would overlook a proposition like that. The simple-mindedness of the fellow! Ghosts, superstition, haunted houses. . . .

I must confess that this particular haunted house looks more convincing than most. It is old and very large, built, I think, by one of the first plantation kings. The thick walls are of red brick that is porous and crumbling. The roof, still fairly sound, has turned a dirty gray. It looks like something dead lying about in the open sunlight. Almost indecent. A very little work would make the place habitable, though.

An old split-rail fence surrounds the house and a plot several acres in extent. I think this was once a lawn, but it is now full of weeds and underbrush. The doors and windows are nothing but holes in the thick walls. At some time or other these were shut up with heavy wood-

en slabs pounded into the brick framework so solidly as to be almost as immovable as the walls themselves. Only one window was open, the one I entered through. Here the shutter had been knocked in—by the former owner, I think my friend said. If it was as solidly fitted as the other slabs the man must have used a battering-ram!

The house is depressing enough, certainly. But for a sane and prosperous fellow to offer five hundred dollars to be convinced that it isn't haunted! However, that is his affair. In the meantime I have nothing to do but sit here in his ridiculous house and scribble anything that comes to my mind, like a silly schoolboy trying to pass the time away as painlessly as possible.

About an hour has passed since I swung myself into the open window, landing in this room where I now am. The first thing I did was to search the place from top to bottom: so many of these houses are haunted by nothing more supernatural than tramps, and I don't want to be clubbed by any surprized knights of the road. But I need not have worried about that. The dust would keep a record of any occupancy, and the dust shows no footprints. It does not cover the floor in an even layer, however. I suppose the wind, coming through the one open window, has stirred it up now and then. Also there are practically no cobwebs in the place. Either the walls are too damp to tempt the spiders, or my friend's ghost is a clean-minded giant and keeps them swept out. Or possibly he is so tall that his head scrapes them off the ceilings!

What rot! The spirit of some big two-legged thing that died and left its bones to be dug up hundreds of thousands of years later! A sort of fossil ghost, I guess one would call it. What a riot that would cause at Brandsted Institute! Here, gentlemen, is a little gift for you. In removing the thigh-bone and skull you only took a part of the beast. In the interest of science I am now pleased to present to you the creature's spirit!

At the end of my little exploration tour I dragged this stool up from the cellar and placed it in front of this equally ancient table. I set the lantern where it would give the most light, and prepared to make myself as comfortable as possible for what promises to be a most uncomfortable night. Then I started to put into use a fountain pen and a pad of paper I brought along to amuse myself with. At different hours of the night I will record my sensations, if any. Later, when I've tired of writing, I shall read a book of fiction I have with me.

I should have brought along a pot of coffee. I am feeling rather sleepy and I don't want to go to sleep. I'd be cramped into knots when I woke, and besides, if our burly spirit is obliging enough to give a demonstration of peevishness at having his castle invaded, I want to be awake to observe it. What nonsense! . . .

First exciting event of the evening just happened! One leg of the old stool I was sitting on came out and I fell over backward. In my effort to save myself from falling I knocked the lantern off the table. Result, one broken glass chimney and about a pint of kerosene spilled out on the floor. Then when I lit it again it smoked unbearably without the glass to protect the flame. And when I tried to regulate the wick I turned it the wrong way. I'm afraid I'm not much of an expert with lanterns. However, I have the candle, and my friend's flashlight — which would probably work if it had a new battery!

I suppose my uneasy land-owner, if he were here, would insist that the little episode was a ghostly manifestation. He would say that a giant's hand had wrenched the leg from the

stool. That's the ridiculous part of these old wives' tales—natural happenings are twisted into meaning supernatural things. The stool is old and rotten, I shifted my weight on it, and the leg came out. How simple!

It is very uncomfortable in here. Although I feel as though I must suffocate in the stagnant air, there is a chill that comes, no doubt, from the moisture-soaked old walls. The fumes of the spilled kerosene are annoying, too. But I don't feel like moving into another room. I would rather not get too far away from that open window—it is the only ventilation the house has.

I said awhile ago that my search through the dark old building had revealed no sign of life. I was wrong. There is life here—a good deal of it. Growing familiar with my presence, several rats have made an appearance from holes in the floor boarding. They are sleek and contented-looking. One big fellow is especially bold. He looks at me with the impudence of a street urchin, seems disposed to come closer and investigate. Ah, the kerosene around my chair stopped him! It's just as well. A rat's bite can be painful, and these creatures seem as unafraid of me as though they'd never seen a human before. One more reason for not moving, though the fumes of the spilled oil are most uncomfortable. I feel half stupefied from them.

I can understand a woman's fear of mice and rats. There's something very disquieting and evil-appearing about them. I feel uneasy myself at watching these rodents, particularly because—of a sudden—they don't seem to be acting normally. They act like the laboratory rats when someone comes to take them to the dissecting-room—scenting danger, at bay, ready to sink their teeth into the nearest hand. The big rat is the most excited of all. . . .

Now that is odd! That is very odd—what I just saw! The big rat began to behave more strangely than ever. It stopped, quivered, and then began to run around in circles. The circles got smaller and smaller until the little animal seemed to spin in its tracks. Then it stopped, fell over—and lay stone-dead! I know it is dead because I just got up and prodded it with my foot. All I can think is that it was out foraging and ate something poisoned. But this doesn't seem logical either. All the other rats have disappeared, leaving the stiff little body on the floor near my table. . . .

Another flurry to while away the long night! As I was looking at the dead rat the candle went out. It was extinguished as suddenly as though a hand had closed over it. There was no breeze from the open window. No air is stirring in the room, nothing. It just—went out! Peculiar. . . .

For some little time I have seemed to hear footsteps, like someone walking about the house, now loud, and again faint. These have been muffled, more felt than heard, as though some heavy person were moving from room to room. It is more a succession of faint tremors than anything else. Probably some earth disturbances far down under the surface. Baby earthquakes. Wish I had a seismograph here. But it really did sound like a giant striding through the house. Of course, it is all imagination. . . .

During the last few moments there has been no noise, no more of the illusion of footsteps. The cellar stairs creaked as though under a great weight, and then there was silence. If I only had some light more certain than a candle I would go down to the cellar just to set my mind at rest that there is nothing there. Imagination should not be encouraged too much when one is alone at night in a deserted house. It doesn't matter how enlightened a man may be, there is some age-old sense of fear that needs only such an opportunity to swamp intelligence. But what if I

did go down there? I would see nothing, of course. When I heard the footsteps, or what sounded like footsteps, right in this room—I could see nothing. Just before the candle went out, just before I relighted it, I could see nothing. There is nothing to see. Nothing to see, of course! . . .

The faint tremors have started again, in regular succession. It *is* odd how much they sound like the footfalls of some incredibly heavy person. Again the cellar stairs creak as though carrying a weight that is more than they were designed to hold. Crack, creak, crack. Like marching bare feet. Now the tremors are strongest. Right in the room, they sound. . . .

My friend, the land-owner, has just played a joke on me. At least I suppose he thinks it is a joke. Without warning he jammed the heavy shutters in place over the window I came through. The only opening in the whole house! He jammed it solidly, too. I could hear the edges splinter as they ground against the thick walls of the embrasure. Hardly a pleasant trick to play on a man. And it doesn't seem to bear out his statement that he is afraid to enter the grounds. He must have sneaked up very cautiously to the outside of the window or I would have heard him. Is this whole thing a sort of practical joke he has engineered on me? But the offer of five hundred dollars—that wasn't a joke.

I am walled in here as helplessly as though I were in a barred prison. It is an unpleasant sensation. . . .

I SHALL have to stop trying to fool my own intelligence and admit that the window couldn't possibly have been shuttered by my host. I can't blind myself any more to the obvious fact that the slab was jammed into the window from the inside! It was lying on the floor, in the room here, where it no doubt fell when the former owner knocked it in. No one could have reached in, raised it at arm's length, and pulled it into place from the outside. Even assuming I wouldn't have seen it, the thing is beyond mortal strength. No one man could have done it. Indeed, one man could hardly lift the shutter, so massive is it. Think, then, of the force necessary to raise it like a feather and jam it so far into the tight fit of the brickwork!

Bah! In a minute I'll begin to think there really is some gigantic power in this house after all, and that it shut me in! What strange delusions enter a man's mind when he is alone in an empty house! I find myself straining my ears and craning my neck for sight or sound of—whatever there may be to see or hear. There is a little rustle and I am persuaded that it is an exclamation of triumph, half a snarl and half a chuckle. The stairs creak again, and I am nearly convinced that something is going up to the top floor. There is an empty feeling in the room as though a presence had been withdrawn. I argue to myself that there really was something in the room—that I heard it and felt it. Ridiculous!

I wonder how that man could have shut the window up. Possibly he had a rope attached to the shutter and pulled it into place by hauling from the outside. But I should have seen if a rope were attached. I couldn't have helped seeing it. I'll tell him what I think of his joke in the morning!

The delusion of footsteps persists. It actually does sound like someone in the garret. If a giant over ten feet tall, with proportionate weight, should walk in the rooms above me—he would make just such a noise. The footfalls ring out at the head of the steps. The stairs groan as under a tremendous weight. The sound comes closer, closer. Now the walls of the room shake as the last step is trodden on and cleared. . . .

Good God! What can be the meaning of this?

There was a whir of air as though someone had walked rapidly past me from the direction of the stairs. A soft scrunch—and the body of the dead rat was flattened out as though a monstrous foot had been planted squarely on it!

Now there is no noise. The footfalls sound out no more. It is as though whatever thing had made them was crouched in the corner behind me. It is a very real hallucination—I can actually feel eyes burning into my back. Yet when I turn to gaze into the darkness of the corner, I see nothing. Nothing!

But after all, what could I expect to see? There is no one in this house but me. I searched it thoroughly. I am alone. I know I am alone! Yet——

It is with a shock of surprize that I discover myself to be still writing. I haven't glanced at the paper before me for moments. Certainly I have given it no attention. My whole conscious mind has been taken up with disturbing thoughts. Subconscious activity, no doubt. Some obscure brain center refuses to be disturbed by the alarms about it, and persists in guiding my fingers over the unnoticed paper. A thing to study over in the morning.

And I wish that morning were here! I don't like this. I don't like it at all. How explain away the manner in which the dead rat was ground down as though under a tremendous heel? There it is—the sleek little body pressed flat by some heavy weight. Right on the floor in front of me. I can't reason that out of existence.

And the way the candle went out!

And how was that big shutter smashed into place over the one exit in the whole house? No man would have had the strength to do that. It would take a giant's arm. Something more powerful than any man. I believe some unseen power *did* wall me in here! I believe——

But this is absurd. I am trembling. The palms of my hands are wet and cold. My heart hurts me, it pounds so. I *must* straighten up, get a grip on my nerves. Wouldn't I look proud if, after all my talking and scoffing, I should clamor to leave this cursed house before morning came!

It seems that I am safe from that disgrace in spite of myself. Just to experiment, I raised my voice as loudly as I could and called for help. Then I shouted again. Now, at least five minutes after, there is no sound. Apparently no one heard. I am indeed alone.

Of course I am alone! Why must I repeat to myself that I searched the house and found no living thing except for the rats? I must argue with myself, it seems, as though I were two instead of one—a mature intelligent man trying patiently to instruct a scared small boy. I repeat, small boy, you are alone. I will say it out loud: You are alone. There is nothing here but you. Nothing can hurt you.

How odd my voice sounds in the silence! It doesn't sound like my voice at all. I suppose if anyone were to hear me talking aloud that way, he would think my mind was a little unhinged. . . .

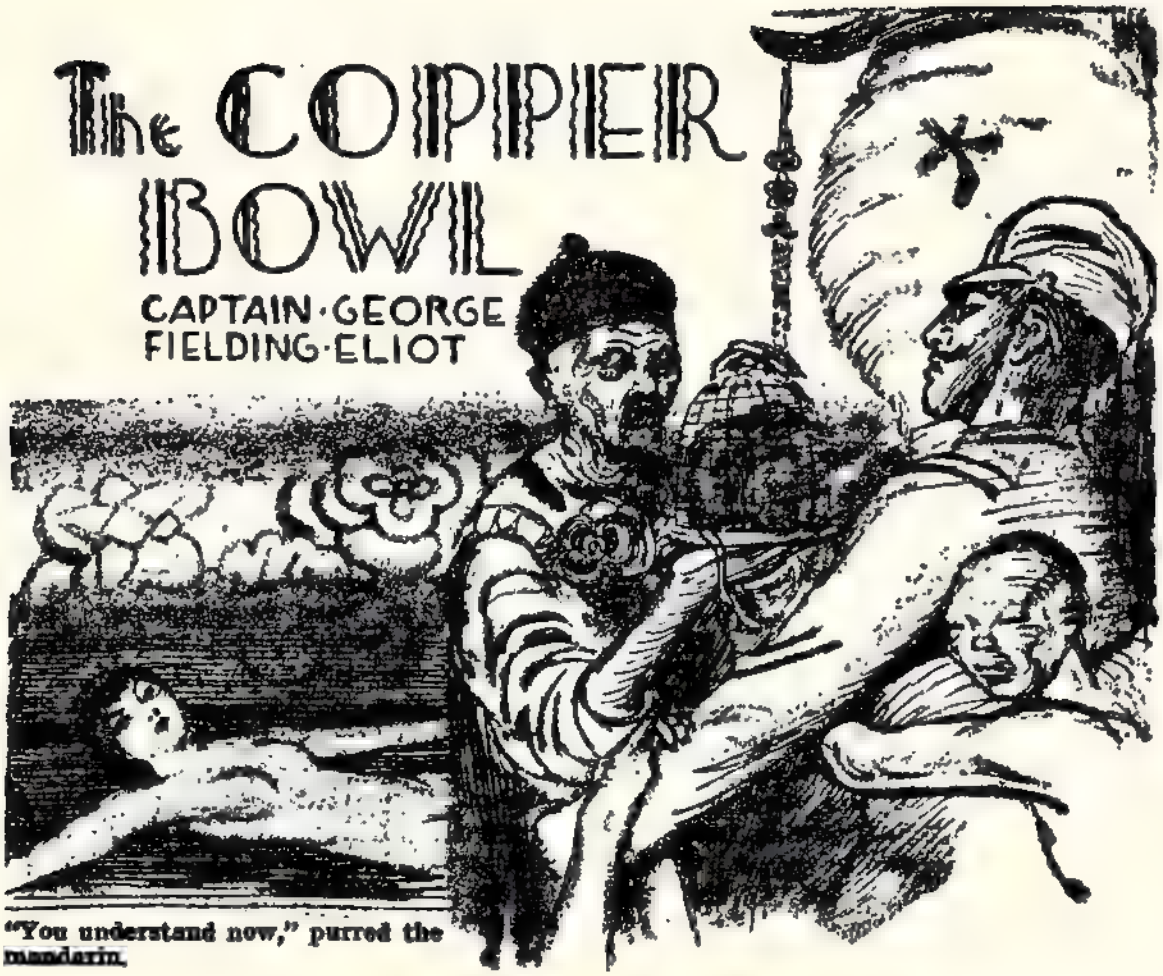
Why doesn't something happen! For half an hour I've crouched here beside the table, always seeming to feel a presence behind me in the corner. There is no noise. Even the rats stay in their holes. No sound. I can hear my own breathing in the stillness of the room. Yet it seems as though something squatted behind me. That is impossible! Of course it is impossible! Careful. Don't lose your grip.

I think I shall tour the house again. Anything to distract my mind. Pos-

(Continued on page 857)

The COPPER BOWL

CAPTAIN GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT



"You understand now," purred the mandarin.

YUAN LI, the mandarin, leaned back in his rosewood chair.

"It is written," he said softly, "that a good servant is a gift of the Gods, whilst a bad one——"

The tall, powerfully built man standing humbly before the robed figure in the chair bowed thrice, hastily, submissively.

Fear glinted in his eye, though he was armed, and moreover was accounted a brave soldier. He could have broken the little smooth-faced mandarin across his knee, and yet——

"Ten thousand pardons, beneficent one," he said. "I have done all—having regard to your honorable order to slay the man not nor do him permanent injury—I have done all that I can. But——"

"But he speaks not!" murmured the mandarin. "And you come to me with a tale of failure? I do not like failures, Captain Wang!"

The mandarin toyed with a little paper-knife, on the low table beside him. Wang shuddered.

"Well, no matter for this time," the mandarin said after a moment. Wang breathed a sigh of most heartfelt relief, and the mandarin smiled softly, fleetingly. "Still," he went on, "our task is yet to be accomplished. We have the man—he has the information we require; surely some way may be found. The servant has failed; now the master must try his hand. Bring the man to me."

Wang bowed low and departed with considerable haste.

The mandarin sat silent for a moment, looking across the wide, sunlit room at a pair of singing birds in a wicker cage hanging in the farther window. Presently he nodded—one short, satisfied nod—and struck a little silver bell which stood on his beautifully inlaid table.

Instantly a white-robed, silent-footed servant entered, and stood with bowed head awaiting his master's pleasure. To him Yuan Li gave certain swift, incisive orders.

The white-robed one had scarcely departed when Wang, captain of the mandarin's guard, re-entered the spacious apartment.

"The prisoner, Benevolent!" he announced.

The mandarin made a slight motion with his slender hand; Wang barked an order, and there entered, between two heavily muscled, half-naked guardsmen, a short, sturdily built man: barefooted, clad only in a tattered shirt and khaki trousers, but with fearless blue eyes looking straight at Yuan Li under the tousled masses of his blond hair.

A white man!

"Ah!" said Yuan Li, in his calm way, speaking faultless French. "The excellent Lieutenant Fournet! Still obstinate?"

Fournet cursed him earnestly, in French and three different Chinese dialects.

"You'll pay for this, Yuan Li!" he wound up. "Don't think your filthy brutes can try the knuckle-torture and their other devil's tricks on a French officer and get away with it!"

Yuan Li toyed with his paper-knife, smiling.

"You threaten me, Lieutenant Fournet," he answered, "yet your threats are but as rose-petals wafted away on the morning breeze—unless you return to your post to make your report."

"Why, damn you!" answered the prisoner. "You needn't try that sort of thing—you know better than to kill me! My commandant is perfectly aware of my movements—he'll be knocking on your door with a company of the Legion at his back if I don't show up by tomorrow at reveillé!"

Yuan Li smiled again.

"Doubtless—and yet we still have the better part of the day before us," he said. "Much may be accomplished in an afternoon and evening."

Fournet swore again.

"You can torture me and be damned," he answered. "I know and you know that you don't dare to kill me or to injure me so that I can't get back to Fort Deschamps. For the rest, do your worst, you yellow-skinned brute!"

"A challenge!" the mandarin exclaimed. "And I, Lieutenant Fournet, pick up your glove! Look you—what I require from you is the strength and location of your outpost on the Mephong River. So——"

"So that your cursed bandits, whose murders and lootings keep you here in luxury, can rush the outpost some dark night and open the river route for their boats," Fournet cut in. "I know you, Yuan Li, and I know your trade—mandarin of thieves! The military governor of Tonkin sent a battalion of the Foreign Legion here to deal with such as you, and to restore peace and order on the frontier, not to yield to childish threats! That is not the Legion's way, and you should know it. The best thing you can do is to send in your submission, or I can assure you that within a fortnight your head will be rotting over the North Gate of Hanoi, as a warning to others who might follow your bad example."

The mandarin's smile never altered, though well he knew that this was no idle threat. With Tonkinese tirailleurs, even with

Colonial infantry, he could make some sort of headway, but these thrice-accursed Legionnaires were devils from the very Pit itself. He—Yuan Li, who had ruled as king in the valley of the Mephong, to whom half a Chinese province and many a square mile of French Tonkin had paid tribute humbly—felt his throne of power tottering beneath him. But one hope remained: down the river, beyond the French outposts, were boats filled with men and with the loot of a dozen villages—the most successful raiding-party he had ever sent out. Let these boats come through, let him have back his men (and they were his best), get his hands on the loot, and perhaps something might be done. Gold, jewels, jade—and though the soldiers of France were terrible, there were in Hanoi certain civilian officials not wholly indifferent to these things. But on the banks of Mephong, as though they knew his hopes, the Foreign Legion had established an outpost—he must know exactly where, he must know exactly how strong; for till this river post was gone, the boats could never reach him.

And now Lieutenant Fournet, staff officer to the commandant, had fallen into his hands. All night his torturers had reasoned with the stubborn young Norman, and all morning they had never left him for a minute. They had marked him in no way, nor broken bones, nor so much as cut or abraded the skin—yet there are ways! Fournet shuddered all over at the thought of what he had gone through, that age-long night and morning.

To Fournet, his duty came first; to Yuan Li, it was life or death that Fournet should speak. And he had taken measures which now marched to their fulfilment.

He dared not go to extremes with Fournet; not yet could French justice connect the Mandarin Yuan Li with the bandits of the Mephong. They might suspect, but they could not prove; and an outrage such as the killing or maiming of a French officer in his own palace was more than Yuan Li dared essay. He walked on thin ice indeed those summer days, and walked warily.

Yet—he had taken measures.

"My head is still securely on my shoulders," he replied to Fournet. "I do not think it will decorate your gate-spikes. So you will not speak?"

"Certainly not!"

Lieutenant Fournet's words were as firm as his jaw.

"Ah, but you will. Wang!"

"Magnanimous!"

"Four more guards. Make the prisoner secure."

Wang clapped his hands.

Instantly four additional half-naked men sprang into the room; two, falling on their knees, seized Fournet round the legs; another threw his corded arms round the lieutenant's waist; another stood by, club in hand, as a reserve in case of —what?

The two original guards still retained their grip on Fournet's arms.

Now, in the grip of those sinewy hands, he was held immovable, utterly helpless, a living statue.

Yuan Li, the mandarin, smiled again. One who did not know him would have thought his smile held an infinite tenderness, a divine compassion.

He touched the bell at his side.

Instantly, in the farther doorway, appeared two servants, conducting a veiled figure—a woman, shrouded in a dark drapery.

A word from Yuan Li—rough hands tore the veil aside, and there stood drooping between the impassive servants a vision of loveliness, a girl scarce out of her teens, dark-haired, slender, with the great appealing brown eyes of a fawn: eyes which widened suddenly as they rested on Lieutenant Fournet.

"Lily!" exclaimed Fournet, and his five guards had their hands full to hold him as he struggled to be free.

"You fiend!" he spat at Yuan Li. "If a hair of this girl's head is touched, by the Holy Virgin of Yvetot I will roast you alive in the flames of your own palace! My God, Lily, how——"

"Quite simply, my dear lieutenant," the mandarin's silky voice interrupted. "We knew, of course—every house-servant in North Tonkin is a spy of mine—that you had conceived an affection for this woman; and when I heard you were proving obdurate under the little attentions of my men, I thought it well to send for her. Her father's bungalow is far from the post—indeed, it is in Chinese and not French territory, as you know—and the task was not a difficult one. And now——"

"André! André!" the girl was crying, struggling in her turn with the servants. "Save me, André—these beasts——"

"Have no fear, Lily," André Fournet replied. "They dare not harm you, any more than they dare to kill me. They are bluffing——"

"But have you considered well, lieutenant?" asked the mandarin gently. "You, of course, are a French officer. The arm of France—and it is a long and unforgiving arm—will be stretched out to seize your murderers. The gods forbid I should set that arm reaching for me and mine. But this girl—ah, that is different!"

"Different? How is it different? The girl is a French citizen——"

"I think not, my good lieutenant Fournet. She is three-quarters French in blood, true; but her father is half Chinese, and is a Chinese subject; she is a resident of China—I think you will find that French justice will not be prepared to avenge her death quite so readily as your own. At any rate, it is a chance I am prepared to take."

Fournet's blood seemed to turn to ice in his veins. The smiling devil was right! Lily—his lovely white Lily, whose only mark of Oriental blood was the rather piquant slant of her great eyes—was not entitled to the protection of the tricolor.

God! What a position! Either betray his flag, his regiment, betray his comrades to their deaths—or see his Lily butchered before his eyes!

"So now, Lieutenant Fournet, we understand each other," Yuan Li continued, after a brief pause to let the full horror of the situation grip the other's soul. "I think you will be able to remember the location and strength of that outpost for me—now?"

Fournet stared at the man in bitter silence, but the words had given the quick-minded Lily a key to the situation, which she had hardly understood at first.

"No, no, André!" she cried. "Do not tell him. Better that I should die than that you should be a traitor! See—I am ready."

Fournet threw back his head: his wavering resolution reincarnate.

"The girl shames me!" he said. "Slay her if you must, Yuan Li—and if France will not avenge her, *I will!* But traitor I will not be!"

"I do not think that is your last word, lieutenant," the mandarin purred. "Were I to strangle the girl, yes—perhaps. But first she must cry to you for help, and when you hear her screaming in agony, the woman you love, perhaps then you will forget these noble heroics!"

Again he clapped his hands; and again silent servants glided into the room. One bore a small brazier of glowing charcoal; a second had a little cage of thick wire mesh, inside of which *something* moved horribly: a third bore a copper bowl with handles on each side, to which was at-

tached a steel band that glittered in the sunlight.

THE hair rose on the back of Fournet's neck. What horror impended now? Deep within him some instinct warned him that what was now to follow would be fiendish beyond the mind of mortal man to conceive. The mandarin's eyes seemed suddenly to glow with infernal fires. Was he in truth man—or demon?

A sharp word in some Yunnan dialect unknown to Fournet—and the servants had flung the girl upon her back on the floor, spread-eagled in pitiful helplessness upon a magnificent peacock rug.

Another word from the mandarin's thin lips—and roughly they tore the clothing from the upper half of the girl's body. White and silent she lay upon that splendid rug, her eyes still on Fournet's: silent, lest words of hers should impair the resolution of the man she loved.

Fournet struggled furiously with his guards: but they were five strong men, and they held him fast.

"Remember, Yuan Li!" he panted. "You'll pay!—damn your yellow soul——"

The mandarin ignored the threat.

"Proceed," he said to the servants. "Note carefully, Monsieur le Lieutenant Fournet, what we are doing. First, you will note, the girl's wrists and ankles are lashed to posts and to heavy articles of furniture, suitably placed so that she can not move. You wonder at the strength of the rope, the number of turns we take to hold so frail a girl? I assure you, they will be required. Under the copper bowl, I have seen a feeble old man tear his wrist free from an iron chain."

The mandarin paused; the girl was now bound so tightly that she could scarce move a muscle of her body.

Yuan Li regarded the arrangements.

"Well done," he approved. "Yet if she tears any limb free, the man who bound that limb shall have an hour under the bamboo rods. Now —the bowl! Let me see it."

He held out a slender hand. Respectfully a servant handed him the bowl, with its dangling band of flexible steel. Fournet, watching with eyes full of dread, saw that the band was fitted with a lock, adjustable to various positions. It was like a belt, a girdle.

"Very well," the mandarin nodded, turning the thing over and over in fingers that almost seemed to caress it. "But I anticipate—perhaps the lieutenant and the young lady are not familiar with this little device. Let me explain, or rather, demonstrate. Put the bowl in place, Kan-su. No, no—just the bowl, this time."

Another servant, who had started forward, stepped back into his corner. The man addressed as Kan-su took the bowl, knelt at the side of the girl, passed the steel band under her body and placed the bowl, bottom up, on her naked abdomen, tugging at the girdle till the rim of the bowl bit into the soft flesh. Then he snapped the lock fast, holding the bowl thus firmly in place by the locked steel belt attached to its two handles and passing round the girl's waist. He rose, stood silent with folded arms.

Fournet felt his flesh crawling with horror—and all this time Lily had said not one word, though the tight girdle, the pressure of the circular rim of the bowl, must have been hurting her cruelly.

But now she spoke, bravely.

"Do not give way, André," she said. "I can bear it—it does—it does not hurt!"

"God!" yelled André Fournet, still fighting vainly against those clutching yellow hands.

"It does not hurt!" the mandarin echoed the girl's last words. "Well, perhaps not. But we will take it

off, notwithstanding. We must be merciful."

At his order the servant removed bowl and girdle. An angry red circle showed on the white skin of the girl's abdomen where the rim had rested.

"And still I do not think you understand, *Mademoiselle* and *Monsieur*," he went on. "For presently we must apply the bowl again—and when we do, under it we will put—*this!*"

With a swift movement of his arm he snatched from the servant in the corner the wire cage and held it up to the sunlight.

The eyes of Fournet and Lily fixed themselves upon it in horror. For within, plainly seen now, moved a great gray rat—a whiskered, beady-eyed, restless, scabrous rat, its white chisel-teeth shining through the mesh.

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" breathed Fournet. His mind refused utterly to grasp the full import of the dreadful fate that was to be Lily's; he could only stare at the unquiet rat—stare—stare——

"You understand *now*, I am sure," purred the mandarin. "The rat under the bowl—observe the bottom of the bowl, note the little flange. Here we put the hot charcoal—the copper becomes heated—the heat is overpowering—the rat can not support it—he has but one means of escape: he gnaws his way out through the lady's body! And now about that outpost, Lieutenant Fournet?"

"No—*no*—*NO!*" cried Lily. "They will not do it—they are trying to frighten us—they are human; men can not do a thing like that—be silent, André, be silent, whatever happens; don't let them beat you! Don't let them make a traitor of you! Ah——"

At a wave from the mandarin, the servant with the bowl again approached the half-naked girl. But this time the man with the cage stepped forward also. Deftly he thrust in a hand, avoided the rat's teeth, jerked the struggling vermin out by the scruff of the neck.

The bowl was placed in position. Fournet fought desperately for freedom—if only he could get one arm clear, snatch a weapon of some sort!

Lily gave a sudden little choking cry.

The rat had been thrust under the bowl.

Click! The steel girdle was made fast—and now they were piling the red-hot charcoal on the upturned bottom of the bowl, while Lily writhed in her bonds as she felt the wriggling, pattering horror of the rat on her bare skin, under that bowl of fiends.

One of the servants handed a tiny object to the impassive mandarin.

Yuan Li held it up in one hand.

It was a little key.

"This key, Lieutenant Fournet," he said, "unlocks the steel girdle which holds the bowl in place. It is yours—as a reward for the information I require. Will you not be reasonable? Soon it will be too late!"

FOURNET looked at Lily. The girl was quiet, now, had ceased to struggle; her eyes were open, or he would have thought she had fainted.

The charcoal glowed redly on the bottom of the copper bowl. And beneath its carven surface, Fournet could imagine the great gray rat stirring restlessly, turning around and around, seeking escape from the growing heat, at last sinking his teeth in that soft white skin, gnawing, burrowing desperately. . . .

God!

His duty—his flag—his regiment—France! Young Sous-lieutenant Pierre Desjardins — gay young Pierre, and twenty men—to be surprized and massacred, horribly, some saved for the torture, by an overwhelming rush of bandit-devils,

through his treachery? He knew in his heart that he could not do it.

He must be strong—he must be firm. . . .

If only he might suffer for Lily—gentle, loving little Lily, brave little Lily who had never harmed a soul. . . .

Loud and clear through the room rang a terrible scream.

André, turning in fascinated horror, saw that Lily's body, straining upward in an arc from the rug, was all but tearing asunder the bonds which held it. He saw, what he had not before noticed, that a little nick had been broken from one edge of the bowl—and through this nick and across the white surface of the girl's heaving body was running a tiny trickle of blood!

The rat was at work.

Then something snapped in André's brain. He went mad.

With the strength that is given to madmen, he tore loose his right arm from the grip that held it—tore loose, and dashed his fist into the face of the guard. The man with the club sprang forward unwarily; the next moment André had the weapon, and was laying about him with berserk fury. Three guards were down before Wang drew his sword and leaped into the fray.

Wang was a capable and well-trained soldier. It was cut, thrust and parry for a moment, steel against wood—then Wang, borne back before that terrible rush, had the reward of his strategy.

The two remaining guards, to whom he had signaled, and a couple of the servants flung themselves together on Fournet's back and bore him roaring to the floor.

The girl screamed again, shattering the coarser sounds of battle.

Fournet heard her—even in his madness he heard her. And as he heard, a knife hilt in a servant's girdle met his hand. He caught at it, thrust upward savagely; a man howled; the weight on Fournet's back grew less; blood gushed over his neck and shoulders. He thrust again, rolled clear of the press, and saw one man sobbing out his life from a ripped-open throat, while another, with both hands clasped over his groin, writhed in silent agony upon the floor.

André Fournet, gathering a knee under him, sprang like a panther straight at the throat of Wang the captain.

Down the two men went, rolling over and over on the floor. Wang's weapons clashed and clattered—a knife rose, dripping blood, and plunged home. . . .

With a shout of triumph André Fournet sprang to his feet, his terrible knife in one hand, Wang's sword in the other.

Screaming, the remaining servants fled before that awful figure.

Alone, Yuan Li the mandarin faced incarnate vengeance.

"The key!"

Hoarsely Fournet spat out his demand; his reeling brain had room for but one thought:

"The key, you yellow demon!"

Yuan Li took a step backward into the embrasured window, through which the jasmine-scented afternoon breeze still floated sweetly.

The palace was built on the edge of a cliff; below that window-ledge, the precipice fell sheer fifty feet down to the rocks and shallows of the upper Mephong.

Yuan Li smiled once more, his calm unruffled.

"You have beaten me, Fournet," he said, "yet I have beaten you, too. I wish you joy of your victory. Here is the key." He held it up in his hand; and as André sprang forward with a shout, Yuan Li turned, took one step to the window-ledge, and without another word was gone into space, taking the key with him.

Far below he crashed in red horror on the rocks, and the waters of the turbulent Mephong closed for ever over the key to the copper bowl.

Back sprang André—back to Lily's side. The blood ran no more from under the edge of the bowl; Lily lay very still, very cold. . . .

God! She was dead!

Her heart was silent in her tortured breast.

André tore vainly at the bowl, the steel girdle—tore with bleeding fingers, with broken teeth, madly—in vain.

He could not move them.

And Lily was dead.

Or was she? What was that?

In her side a pulse beat—beat strongly and more strongly. . . .

Was there still hope?

The mad Fournet began chafing her body and arms.

Could he revive her? Surely she was not dead—could not be dead!

The pulse still beat—strange it beat only in one place, on her soft white side, down under her last rib——

He kissed her cold and unresponsive lips.

When he raised his head the pulse had ceased to beat. Where it had been, blood was flowing sluggishly—dark venous blood, flowing in purple horror.

And from the midst of it, out of the girl's side, the gray, pointed head of the rat was thrust, its muzzle dripping gore, its black eyes glittering beadily at the madman who gibbered and frothed above it.

So, an hour later, his comrades found André Fournet and Lily his beloved—the tortured maniac keening over the tortured dead.

But the gray rat they never found.

REGARDING BACK NUMBERS

A great many requests have come in to the publishers of WEIRD TALES for back numbers that we are unable to supply, as our stock of early issues was exhausted long ago. Lately we have only been able to fill orders for back numbers dating from the issue of July, 1926, to the present time.

Also, from time to time we have had letters from persons who possess back numbers, and in some cases complete files of WEIRD TALES, which they wish to sell.

As we ourselves can not supply issues of this magazine prior to the July issue of 1926, we want to offer a service to those who wish to sell their back issues to other readers who desire to purchase them. Through this office we will get the seller in touch with the buyer. If you are interested in selling any of your old issues of WEIRD TALES for the years 1923, 1924, 1925, and the first half of 1926, please write to Weird Tales, Service Department, 450 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ill., and tell us what you have and what price per copy you are asking. On the other hand, if you are interested in purchasing back numbers of this magazine, write and tell us what numbers you would like to purchase, and we will try to get you in touch with someone who has these numbers for sale.

A Short, Tragic Tale Is

The Statement of Justin Parker

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MY SOLE desire in writing this is to place before the public all that I know of the singular facts attending the disappearance of Michael Salisbury, retired, from his home on Salisbury Plain, on the seventeenth day of December last.

Michael Salisbury and I had always been the best of friends since childhood; we were together always, until late in 1916, when he went to the African Veldt to spend over seven years there. He had hardly returned—as a matter of fact, it was on the train that I met him—before I left for the Veldt.

The incident is rather peculiar, and it may aid in a manner to throw light on what followed. I was on board a train leaving London for Liverpool; he had just come in from Liverpool. He came rushing into my compartment, two bags in his hands, looking nervously to right and left. Suddenly he saw me. He stopped, dropped his bags, and came over to sit down beside me.

"My dear Justin, think of seeing you here!" It was obvious to me from the beginning that the man didn't have the least idea what he was saying.

"Just returning from the Veldt, Michael?" I asked. "Aren't you on the wrong train? This one isn't going anywhere near your home."

"Oh, no! Right train, all right. Connections—everything tip-top. Liverpool train, isn't it?"

"Yes," said I. "Didn't you just come from there?"

"To be sure. But I've the right train. I'll fool them."

"'Fool them?'" I repeated, astonished. "Whatever are you talking about?" I began to think that the Veldt had seriously affected Michael Salisbury.

"My valet and housekeeper. Fool them—came in on a different train."

The prevarication was too obvious. All the while he was looking from the car windows and staring up and down the aisles at the people in the car. Besides, his valet had been with him to the Veldt; of course, he might have returned before him . . . there was that possibility.

We talked for some little time; he in the same disconnected manner, with his eyes on everything at once, especially the car windows. The moment the train stopped at the first station outside London he jumped up with his bags, which some well-meaning porter had a time before removed from the aisle. On the platform he turned and shouted.

"Right after all, Justin; it is the wrong train."

I went on to Liverpool, deeply concerned over this strange and unaccountable action on the part of Michael Salisbury. At Liverpool I took a boat for Calais, and three

months later I was in the Great Veldt, which my friend had just left.

I returned from the Veldt on the fifth of December; on the seventh I received a short note from Michael Salisbury. It was somewhat disconnected, but I gathered that he earnestly wished me to come down to his home some distance out on the Plain and spend a few days with him. I have given this note to the press, and I believe that it is now in the possession of Messrs. Montague and Saunders of Chancery Lane.

I arrived on the tenth of December, and I found a somewhat different Michael Salisbury from the one I had seen some years before. His rooms were hung in solid, unrelieved black; he himself wore nothing but black, stalking around most of the time in a heavy, black dressing-gown. His hair looked as if it had never been combed, and it had begun to gray at the temples. He had grown a beard which covered more than half his face. He wore a gold-rimmed pince-nez with smoked glasses. These melancholy conditions were wholly contrary to Michael Salisbury's temperament, and you can imagine that I was not slow in asking him what it all meant. But he ventured little by way of explanation.

"It's hard to cast a shadow on black, Justin," he said, an offering which whetted my curiosity still more.

"But why this aversion to shadows?" I asked at once.

"The angle at which a shadow is cast determines for the distant observer exactly the position of the object casting it."

This answer puzzled me beyond words. Surely you can not blame me when I say that I began to cast sidelong glances at Michael Salisbury, fearing at first for his sanity. I remonstrated with him.

"Never mind, Justin," he said at last. "Tomorrow I'll tell you all about it." Then he laughed and said, "And I'll explain just how it happened that I of all people got the wrong train at London a few years ago."

And with that he packed me off to bed, for it was already late at night when I arrived. It seemed to me a good sign that he remembered as a jest that adventure of four years before, and I went to bed thoroughly convinced that I was to hear something far out of the ordinary.

And I was not disappointed. A great majority of those who read this will not attach a bit of significance or truth to the strange narrative that Michael Salisbury told me on the morning of the eleventh of December. I admit that I myself doubted the tale at first.

"It's rather an incredible tale, Justin," he began; "nevertheless, I'll vouch for it. When I came from the Veldt four years ago, I had with me a diamond, which I had taken from the domain of a certain pigmy tribe in the Veldt. The diamond was part of a makeshift idol, worshiped by these people. These dark-skinned pigmies, strangely enough, were not a fraction as barbaric as their neighbors on all sides. Their priests were the educated men of the village; three of them could speak English, having learned it from an English explorer some years before I came. These three priests were the historians of the village, the chief tradesmen, and, most important, the guardians of the idol their people worshiped. They were robed in costumes decidedly similar to those of the Egyptian priests of Ra; they wore ornaments of beaten gold and silver, and used great quantities of beaten copper. Under their leadership, the pigmies had established trade with more civilized colonies along the coast.

"The weapons these pigmies used were a queer sort of blow-guns, through which they projected grayish pellets—soft things, composed of thousands of minute microbes en-

cysted, covered by a skin of gelatin. As yet I have no knowledge of these microbes, save that they devour anything they come to, with the exception of glass and metal. When these pellets are shot from the guns, they break upon impact and the microbes emerge, multiplying so rapidly as to look like a puddle of gray water spreading out on all sides. I have seen an entire tribe of savages wiped out by this horror. Acid is the only thing that will kill it. I think that there is only one other man that I know of who has had experience with these microbes; that is Dr. Maxwell, who terms it the 'gray death'.

"You can easily see that I had plenty of reason to be frightened when I got off the train in London, only to discover that I had been trailed all the way from Africa by one of the pigmy priests, who stood not far behind me on the platform. On the verge of panic, I dashed through the crowd, hoping to elude him, and at last I boarded the first train that came to hand—the train on which you were setting out for Liverpool. When I saw you on the train—you, who knew that I was arriving from the Veldt that day—and when I saw that you had already seen me, I had only one course to take: that was to make up something to throw you off the track. I wasn't going to fill you full of silly fears until I was positively sure of my pursuit—though, God knows, I was sure, only I hated to admit it to myself. Then I told you on the spur of the moment that I was playing some silly prank upon my servants. I knew the tale was totally awry, and almost laughed at the expression on your face, but it was the best I could do at the time.

"I left the train when I was finally sure that I had not been followed, and hired a car to drive me all the way to my home here on the Plain. I saw nothing of the pigmy priest for over four years after.

"Then one day last October, while wandering about on the moor, I noticed someone in the ruined chapel. You've seen the chapel, haven't you? I thought you had. At any rate, I thought nothing of the matter at the moment, thinking perhaps that some children had wandered out here—which is not so unusual as it sounds, but when I went closer to look into it, I found on the ground near the ruined structure an amulet of beaten gold. For a moment I was stunned. But I knew whom I had so fortunately spied, and I fled as fast as I could go to the confines of my home."

He stopped and pointed all around him with his stick to the black hangings and to his own black robe.

"I've seen those pigmies strike an object with their accursed pellets when it was securely out of sight—they judged its position exactly by the angle at which its shadow was thrown."

As I said, I didn't quite know how to take this story. At first I was all for the theory that he had made a mistake about being followed, but he would have none of it, and actually became angry when I persisted. Then he showed me the diamond that he had risked his life for, and to do it justice I must say that I thought it well worth such a risk. He had kept the jewel hidden in a secret safe behind his bookcases.

Never for once did Michael Salisbury cease his vigilance; he dressed always in black, and maintained a constant watch. On one occasion he confided to me that there was nothing he feared so much as the dreaded Lama sorcery, a form of animal magnetism practised by African tribes, and with which he was familiar. He never ventured to explain this magnetism to me; consequently I am totally in the dark concerning it.

For five days nothing happened to break the monotony of life out on the Plain; on the sixth day, Decem-

ber seventeenth, Michael Salisbury vanished. He must have disappeared in the early morning, for we had been having a lengthy conversation the night before, and neither of us had retired before midnight. His clothes were all in his room, with the exception of his black silk dressing-gown and his slippers.

The first thing I did, when I had ascertained that Michael Salisbury was nowhere about, was to look for the gem. It was gone. As no one but Michael and myself knew the combination and location of that safe, Michael must have taken it. But where could the man have gone in his dressing-gown? For some time I was more than confident that he would turn up sometime during the day.

I don't know what possessed me to go to the ruined chapel that afternoon. But I went, crossing the moor just as the sun began to sink below the horizon. The chapel was an ordinary affair, except that it was antique. Old stone, broken panes of painted glass—the usual thing. Its floor, however, was unusual: it was of earth, and the insidious advance of the water under the earth had made it soggy.

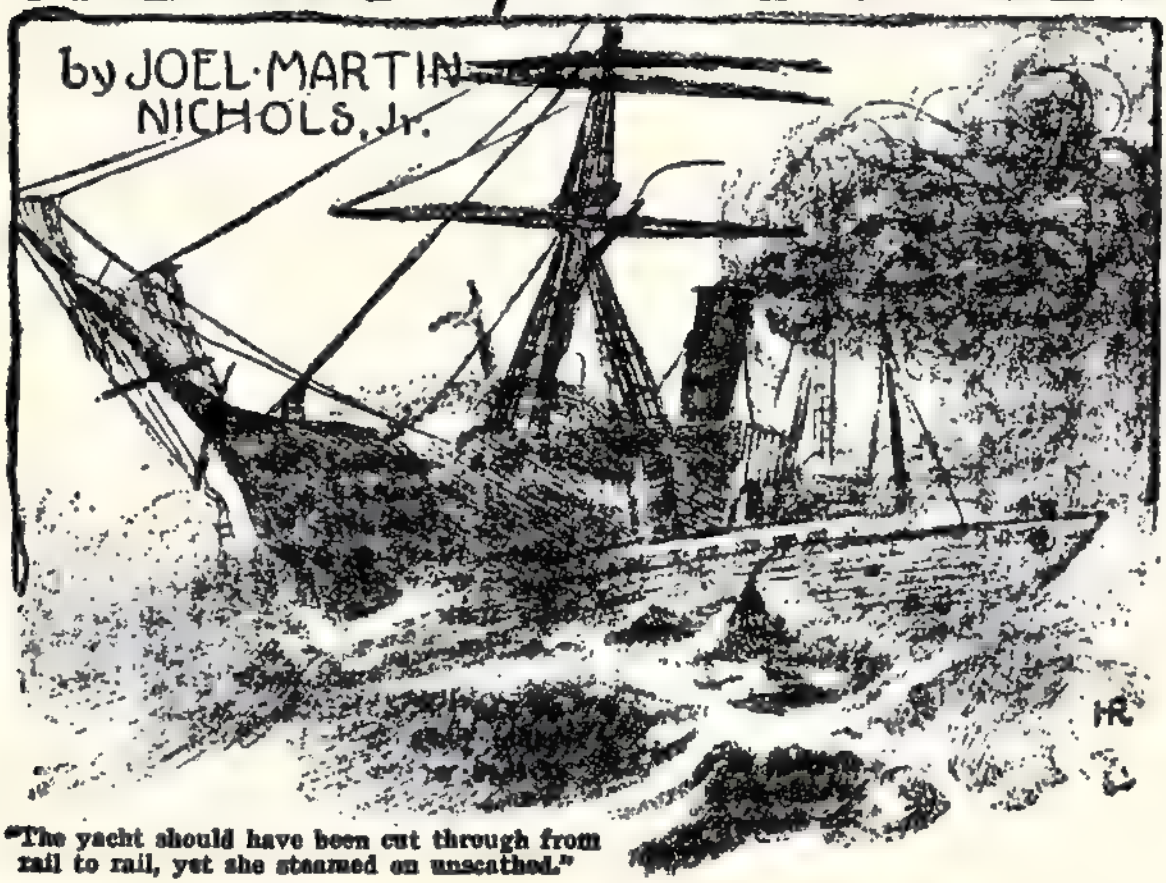
I saw nothing unusual about the structure when I approached it. I made a note of the fact that I would have to hurry to get back to the house before darkness settled over the moor, and began to wonder whether or not Michael would have returned. I entered the chapel, proceeding cautiously over the wet, miry soil. But abruptly I stopped. In the mud before me lay a grayish bubble that contracted and expanded in a sort of rhythmic movement about something that lay in its midst. I bent closer, the better to see what it was. As I did so, my handkerchief fell from my coat pocket—fell directly into this gray bubble. More quickly than I can tell, the grayish mass had spread over the cloth and devoured it. Again I caught sight of the object in the midst of it.

And in that moment I recognized it. It was that recognition that made me turn and run from the chapel—run haphazardly across the moor. And it was that knowledge that sent me to Liverpool that same night to see whether or not a small brown man, answering to the description of an African pigmy from the Veldt, had taken passage on any outgoing ship. As if in confirmation to my recognition of the thing in the chapel, I found that a man such as the one I sought had taken passage bound for Calais, and I have wired there to have him seized on landing, and searched for the gem I know he has.

But I have some knowledge of these priests; the gem will not be found, yet it is the only thing I could have done. For the thing in the midst of that seething bubble was the gold-rimmed pince-nez that Michael Salisbury had worn when I last saw him.

THE ISLE of LOST SOULS

by JOEL·MARTIN NICHOLS, Jr.



"The yacht should have been cut through from rail to rail, yet she steamed on unscathed."

Prologue

IN THE early summer of 1928 the steam yacht *Narcissus,* owned by the scientist-inventor, John Melville Shepard, was lost in the Pacific Ocean under particularly mysterious circumstances.

When she disappeared the vessel was en route to Hawaii from San Francisco carrying on board Mr. Shepard and his family, together with Jeremiah Hillis, who assisted Mr. Shepard in the operation of the deep-sea diving-bell with which he had recently equipped the ship for exploring the depths of the Pacific. The *Narcissus* was captained by Count Alexius Karlak, one-time officer in the Imperial Russian Navy. The second in command was Rudolph Brillits, also a naval officer during the imperial regime. The crew, with three exceptions, were Russians, all having apparently been brought together purposely at the instigation of the captain and his second officer.

Five days out of San Francisco Mr. Shepard and his family, together with the three non-Russian members of the crew, were turned adrift in one of the yacht's open boats. Hillis was held captive aboard. The *Narcissus* stood by at a distance of several miles until the small boat was picked up by the freighter, *Bemis,* which had been called to the scene by radio from the *Narcissus* intimating that the yacht was in trouble.

The last seen of the yacht was by the lookout of the freighter, who reported that she steamed away due

north as soon as the small boat had been picked up. The *Bemis* immediately radioed the facts to the United States naval authorities, and three destroyers were dispatched in pursuit. Ten days later, two of the flotilla, consisting of the *Preble* and the *Ordway*, sighted the *Narcissus* steaming at full speed in the general direction of Bakelief Island, one of the last of the rocky protuberances which make up the Aleutian Islands. At this moment the *Narcissus* made the third point of a triangle consisting of herself and the two destroyers. These last immediately closed in, forcing the yacht to shift her course straight for Bakelief. Escape seemed impossible. The *Preble* ordered the yacht to heave to, and on her failure to do so, hurled a three-inch shell across her bows. At this moment one of the dense fogs so characteristic of these latitudes blanketed the *Narcissus* from view. When it lifted a few moments later, the yacht had disappeared.

The flotilla combed that section of the North Pacific for three succeeding weeks. Although their search was so thorough that scarcely a floating chip could have escaped, the *Narcissus* had vanished.

Eighty-six years later, on an afternoon in May in the year 2014, the coast guard cutter *Sitka* was steaming eastward just south of Bakelief Island. There were fogs as usual. Suddenly out of the murk to leeward in the pan of gray sea which lay between the *Sitka* and Bakelief Island a ship appeared. So near was she and so sudden her appearance that the startled lookout in the cutter's crow's-nest was too paralyzed with apprehension to shout a warning. The quartermaster, however, saw the ship almost as soon as did the lookout and jammed the wheel hard down. The *Sitka* swerved sharply to port, hoping to avoid the blow, but the distance between the two vessels was too short and the sharp prow of the cutter tore into the stranger.

And yet, instead of the ripping crash of rending plates and splintering timbers, there came no sound save the pulsing throb of the *Sitka's* engines! The ship which should have been rammed and sinking by that time steamed on, the officers on her bridge apparently paying not the least attention.

The *Sitka*, according to all the known laws of distance, should have rammed her just abaft the funnels. And yet, somehow, in a way those on the deck of the *Sitka* could never explain, the stranger pushed on and a moment later was lost in the fog.

The incident was put down in naval annals as a trick of the atmosphere, visibility in those latitudes often playing queer pranks on the mariners. And so it remained. But the man in the crow's-nest and the quartermaster at the wheel of the *Sitka* swore until their dying day that as the phantom ship steamed out of their path they read in plain gold letters across her stern the name: *Narcissus*. And they maintained, too, that looking back at the time they saw no wake behind her. But the *Narcissus* was never seen again.

1. Dr. Trask

In the year 2014, exactly three days before the incident of the *Sitka* and the phantom ship, a man in his late twenties, going by the name of Ralph Hearne, was riding in the Lexington Avenue subway in New York City. The car was not so crowded at the time but that he was able to hold his newspaper unfolded before him as he read, and so in this manner his left hand had come within the vision of the traveler beside him. This was a heavily built man of middle age with a long, narrow face made longer by a pointed gray imperial which in its turn seemed to enhance the thin, aquiline nose and the curiously shaped ears, lobeless at the bottom and running to a point at the top. At

this moment the older man's narrow-set eyes had settled with a peculiar gleam of satisfaction on the heavy gold seal ring which adorned the finger of the young man—a ring so well worn that the inscription embossed on its surface had been all but obliterated.

Once or twice, as if in fascination, the bearded man's hand had half reached out to the ring only to be withdrawn with obvious mental effort. Now he touched the young man's arm. "Pardon," said he in a heavy bass voice which went well with his appearance, "you have a very strange ring there. May I ask where you got it?"

The younger man, rather pale of face and poor of dress and yet with a certain distinction in his features, looked up from his paper, plainly more startled by the nearness of that gruff voice to his ear than by the strangeness of the question.

"Oh, I can't tell you," he answered. "It's a family heirloom. It was left to me—that is, it was left *with* me—by my parents when they died."

The older man nodded. "May I examine it?" he asked.

The young man slipped it off and passed it over to the other, who seized it eagerly between long, powerful fingers. For a moment he examined it closely, turning it this way and that to throw a better light on its yellow surface. Finally he pulled out a small magnifying glass, continuing his scrutiny even more carefully under the lens. From time to time during the examination his eyes shifted to the man beside him, taking in with quick understanding the worn yet neatly mended clothing, the patched shoes and the general air of genteel poverty.

"Will you sell it?" he demanded abruptly.

The young man shook his head. "I couldn't," said he.

"Were your people Russian?" demanded his inquisitor, handing back the ring.

The young man flushed. "I don't know," he replied, in a voice so faint that the bearded man bent closer, drinking in eagerly every word. "I haven't the faintest idea. You see, I was—er—I was a foundling. Somebody left me, a three-weeks old baby, at the door of the Seaman's Institute here in New York City. This ring was tied about my neck by a bit of string. I've clung to it, hoping that some day I might——"

The bearded man interrupted, laying a heavy hand on the speaker's arm. "Listen," he said, "I am a physician with a more than ordinary scientific turn of mind. I dabble in psychiatry and hypnotism and that sort of thing. It so happens that at the present moment I am in need of an assistant in my laboratory—somebody who'll be willing to be the subject for a few harmless experiments. If you are willing to put yourself in my hands I can pay you well. You will suffer no pain, and there will be no drawbacks whatsoever. And the work, on the other hand, will be more than fascinating. I can pay as high as fifty dollars a week. If you prove satisfactory, there may be more later."

The face of the younger man lit up. "I'll take it," he said, after a moment's thought. "As a matter of fact I've been looking for work all day. Lost my job because I was too sleepy after nights of study. I'm hoping to be a lawyer, you see. My name's Hearne—Ralph Hearne."

The bearded man drew a card from his pocket. "'Call at No. —— East Twenty-Eighth Street, tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock," he directed. "That's way over by the river but you can find it all right. Here's my station. Good-bye."

Hearne, looking up in sign of parting, noticed for the first time a faint line of purple, a birthmark running from the end of the bearded man's

left eye and disappearing in the fringe of the gray imperial at the corner of his mouth. Then, glancing down at the card he saw engraved there:

DR. GREGORY TRASK
PSYCHIATRIST

2. Into the Past

HEARNE went to the given address the next day at the stipulated hour and found himself ushered into a small sitting-room by a young woman whose pale, almost emaciated features had not entirely effaced a certain elusive, dark-eyed beauty. For a moment he paused on the threshold, startled by a vague familiarity which he imagined he saw in her face, and she, too, stared back at him, saying no word.

"Why—why," he began, "it almost seems as though I'd seen you somewhere before. You—you—where could it have been?"

Blood suddenly rushed into her wan cheeks. She closed the door behind him and bade him pass on into the corridor.

"No," she said, almost inaudibly. "It's not possible."

"But I'm almost sure," he protested.

"Quick, please," she whispered. "He's coming."

At that moment Dr. Trask appeared in the doorway. Hearne saw a heavy flood of red pour into the Mephistophelian features of the scientist. Ignoring Hearne and walking swiftly across the room the physician seized the girl by the arm, his powerful fingers sinking deep into the flesh. With that she gave a low cry of pain and went whiter still.

"What business is this?" he hissed. "Why do you delay here at the door? I told you to show him in promptly. Go back to your room. I will deal with you later."

"I say, it's really my fault," put in Hearne, dismayed. "I—I thought I'd met her somewhere before. Awfully sorry to have delayed you."

Dr. Trask turned to him, the flicker of anger which still lingered in his eyes belying the honeyed smoothness of his voice. "It is nothing," he remarked. "I'm a bit out of sorts today and any delay annoys me greatly. Kindly step into the laboratory and we'll get busy immediately."

He led the way through an intervening corridor into a spacious, high-ceiled room lit from the roof by a series of skylights. On the walls were racks of test-tubes, retorts and glass jars, while bits of intricate electrical apparatus connecting with a maze of colored wires were scattered about on tables and benches. At the farther end a man was bending over a microscope.

"This is Merwin, my assistant," said Dr. Trask, beckoning to the other. Hearne saw a tall, rawboned individual, whose low beetle-brows matching a thick, unkempt thatch of black hair and wide, thin-lipped mouth under an almost bridgeless nose indicated a surly, brutish nature.

Trask offered Hearne a chair and then sat down beside him while Merwin placed a small stand containing a goblet, a medicine dropper and a small phial of colorless liquid at his side.

"As you perhaps remember from our conversation of yesterday," he began, "I am a psychiatrist, a doctor of mental maladies. Unlike most of those in my profession I also employ medicines in the cure of my patients as well as hypnosis and other forms of mental suggestion. Being virtually new in this field I have been obliged to develop my own compounds—and in the course of my work I have come upon drugs containing properties hitherto unknown to man."

He pulled the small phial toward him and tapped it with his forefinger. "I have here an elixir of peculiar properties which if used in conjunction with hypnosis and certain elec-

trical agitation of the brain throws the subject into a state from which he can view the events of a previous existence. You are not, by the way, a believer in the theory of transmigration of souls? No? Well, no matter—whether you believe now or not is a thing of small consequence, for I am quite convinced you will be a firm believer before we are done with our experiment.

"Suffice it to say that the soul which occupies the body of Ralph Hearne at this moment has existed in other bodies since the beginning of time. What I do is only to cast the soul back into a previous state. Your body and your conscious will remaining here with me, however, you are able to tell me exactly what you are doing at the period of time to which your soul returns. Although you are now Ralph Hearne, a simple American citizen, you have been in the past a Russian grand duke or a tsar or perhaps only a poor mujik. I make the reference Russian because of the ring you wear. Although you may not know it, it is Russian; I have seen many of them in Russia, being myself of Russian descent."

"I don't know that I understand what you mean," said Hearne dubiously. "You say you wish to cast my soul back into a previous life in order that I may live through the events of that life. In my understanding, the word 'previous' means something which has gone before—something which has been completed. If, perchance, I had been a grand duke in some past age, as you say, then the body of that grand duke has by this time turned to dust. How would it be possible for my soul to go back and live in a body which has long since crumbled in dust?"

"There you are wrong," answered Dr. Trask. "I used the word 'previous' merely because I wished you to understand better what I intended to do with your soul. You make the common mistake of assuming that these past lives of yours came *before* this one in point of time, but I tell you they do not come before, or after, but run co-existent with it."

"You mean," demanded Hearne, incredulously, "that at this identical moment my soul is occupying a body not only in this world but in some other world also?"

"Precisely. I might go even farther than that. I might say your soul inhabits another body on this very same planet, Earth. It would, however, be in a different dimension from the one in which you now are. It is theoretically possible that your soul inhabits not only the body of Ralph Hearne here on this floor in this room, but also another body on this floor in this room. The body of Ralph Hearne would be unaware of the other body because the other body would be in another dimension of space.

"Let me make an analogy for you," continued Dr. Trask, seeing the puzzled look in Hearne's eyes. "We will first begin with the old theory of the transmigration of souls, which has nothing to do with the dimensions of space. Imagine a series of iron tubes—say six—placed side by side. Imagine that when a person is born he begins life at one end of one of these tubes and progresses through this tube until death releases him at the other end. Each tube, therefore, represents the course of a lifetime.

"Now imagine that these tubes are numbered from left to right beginning with No. 6 at the left and ending with No. 1 at the right. Imagine that Tube 6 encloses the life of a person born in the year 1000 and dying in the year 1100. Tube five encloses the life of a person born in 1300 and dying in 1400. Tube 4 encloses a life born in 1900 and dying in 2000. Tube 3 encloses the life of Ralph Hearne, born, let us say, in the year 2000 and dying in the year 2100. And so on with the other two tubes.

"Now according to the *old* theory of the transmigration of souls, a soul

may be born into the body of John Smith, who goes through life in Tube 6; that is, he lives from the year 1000 to the year 1100. On the death of John Smith this same soul goes into the body of Frank Jones, who lives through Tube 5, that is, from 1300 to 1400. On the death of Frank Jones this soul enters the new-born body of Thomas Atkins in Tube 4. Once the life span of Atkins is completed this same soul enters into the new-born body of Ralph Hearne. From Hearne it will go to another body in the next tube, and so on. In other words, the soul now living in the body of Ralph Hearne also lived in other bodies in ages past. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly."

"That is the *old* theory of the transmigration of souls—or at any rate that part of the theory which concerns my argument. The new theory—*my* theory—is a far better one because it explains much in the universe which has hitherto remained inexplicable. Now according to my theory there is no such thing as time in the sense of a past, a present, and a future. I hold that *all* is in the present. There is no past, no future. Our sense of a past and a future, that is, our sense of the passing of time, comes merely from the fact that our puny brain, being totally unaware of the stupendousness of the universe, can comprehend the universe *only with relation to itself*. The human brain can take in and understand only an infinitesimal fraction of the universe at one time; hence there arises a necessity for it to measure and compare one thing with another and everything with itself. That gives us our sense of the passage of time. That gives us our sense of a beginning and an end, whereas there is really no beginning and no end to anything.

"Now let us go back to our six tubes. According to the old theory of the transmigration of souls, the soul now residing in the body of Ralph Hearne has come up through the ages, born into a body at birth, living in it until death, then going on to another new-born body, and so on. But if you accept the new theory—the theory that there is no past and no future—you must assume that the soul now in the body of Ralph Hearne lives also at this moment in countless other bodies throughout the universe, these bodies being separated from one another by the innumerable dimensions of space with which the universe is made up. Coming back to our tubes, the same soul—the Ralph Hearne soul, let us call it—living in Tube 3 lives also at the same moment in all the other tubes.

"I wish to go a little farther with our tube analogy. Imagine that a single strand of wire is strung over these six tubes from left to right. Imagine that at various intervals along this wire six other wires are attached, each wire dropping down into a small hole in each one of the six tubes. Imagine an electric current generated through this wire. Then, if there were a small engine in each tube connected up with each wire, that engine could be run, could it not? Well, if you imagine that each of these small engines in each tube is a human soul, you would say that all of the souls were connected together and all ran simultaneously. And that is precisely the case with the human soul in the universe. It is like the current in that wire. It runs all the little engines at once, and the current in one engine is not one whit different from the current in another. You might say that the current is the *universal* soul and that this universal soul has offshoots into each tube where it becomes an *individual* soul. The soul of Ralph Hearne is merely the individual soul, an offshoot, as it were, of a universal soul. The soul of Dr. Trask is merely an individual soul, an offshoot of another universal soul. The universe is teeming with universal souls which are in turn subdivided into countless individual souls.

When the body dies, as we say, the individual soul is merely absorbed back into its parent or universal soul."

"But how is it, if these individual souls are all connected up with each other through their universal soul; one soul is not conscious of the other?" put in Hearne.

"I am coming to that now. Neither you, nor I, nor the vast majority of persons are conscious of our other souls because of the physical limitations of the brain. Your brain stands between your soul and your mind, your consciousness. Every pulsation that comes from one soul to another must pass through the brain before the individual mind is aware of it. But the human brain is so atrophied by disuse that it can no longer receive and transmit these faint pulsations. Hence you are oblivious of any other being than your own. There are some exceptions to this rule in the case of people called spirit mediums. Their brains are so constructed that they may receive and transmit to the inner consciousness these soul pulsations. Mediums are generally born with this ability, but it is also possible by terrific mental exertion to revive the atrophied portion of the brain to a point where it will receive and transmit soul pulsations. However, the task is a tremendous one and none but the Brahmins of India and similar cults have the time and patience to keep up with it.

"Now what I propose to do with you is this: I propose to give you certain stimulants, certain drugs, which in conjunction with electrical agitation of the brain will awaken its dormant part to a point where it will receive and transmit soul pulsations from some other body with which your soul is connected. In that condition you will be able to sit here and tell me precisely what your soul, or your spirit—whichever you choose to call it—is doing at this moment in another body.

"It so happens that I am making an intensive study of the events which occurred around the year 1928, but unfortunately I have not been able to perfect my apparatus to a point where I can cause you at the first attempt to receive soul pulsations from the body in which your soul is at that period located. I shall have to experiment a bit by receiving pulsations from first one body and then another until we come to the body in which I am interested. Because of the delicacy of my apparatus I can not run it backward; so to make sure I shall try first a very early period, working up through the centuries until we receive pulsations from your 1928 soul, as it were. Of course I am using the terms 'early' and 'centuries' merely to make it clearer to you. Your other bodies, as I have just pointed out, are not living before your own body in point of time but are living concurrently with it and in a different dimension of space."

"I don't quite understand what you mean by the other dimensions of space," put in Hearne. "Can you make that clearer?"

"Only by a crude analogy," replied Dr. Trask. "Our minds, being three-dimensional minds, can not comprehend a fourth dimension except in theory, much less a fifth or a sixth or seventh. You and I are conscious of three dimensions in space—length, breadth and thickness. Put one of us in an air-tight iron box and we would not get out because all of the sides—all three dimensions—would be barred to us. But put a man whose brain comprehended four dimensions in that same iron box and he would immediately see one dimension—one side—which we had not stopped up and hence he could step out and be free—one side we did not close to him when we made the box."

Hearne leaned back in his chair. "I really can't believe you'll be able to do it," he said. "But go ahead."

MERWIN placed two copper electrodes attached to wire from the apparatus on the table in Hearne's hands while Dr. Trask put three drops of the colorless liquid from the phial into the goblet of water. Then standing over Hearne so that he could look him steadily in the eyes, the psychiatrist bade him drink.

Scarcely had the last of the water drained into Hearne's throat than his body stiffened, his eyes closed, and with a long, heavy sigh he lapsed into unconsciousness. Trask immediately seized his pulse, counting the beats until they gradually died away to a flutter and then ceased altogether.

Apparently satisfied at the young man's condition, Dr. Trask turned his attention immediately to the ring on his hand, pulling it easily from his finger while the giant Merwin peered over his shoulder, his small pig-eyes full of curiosity. "Do you think it's the one, sure enough?" he demanded.

"Of course," snapped Dr. Trask. "There's only one in existence. I recognized it immediately I saw it. The question now is, are the pellets still there as the manuscript says?"

With these words he began twisting at the seal with his lean, powerful fingers. For a moment it withstood the pressure and he tapped it impatiently against the arm of the chair. Then he twisted again and the seal came loose in his hand. Glancing at the back of it, he saw there, held in place by a film of transparent gut, two tiny tablets, pale green in color.

"There they are," he exclaimed excitedly. "I knew I couldn't be mistaken."

"Well, then there ain't no need of us going any further with this chap, is there?" demanded Merwin. "We can have another made like it and change them while he's in one of the trances. Or maybe it would be easier to finish him off and be done with it. Nobody knows him in this town. We could burn his carcass to nothin' with acids. They'd never get us. What say—shall I give him a dose of carbolic?"

"No, you fool. Don't you realize we'll need him when we make our final attempt? The more people we take back with us the more chance we'll have of breaking the train of events as it was then. And if we don't break it sufficiently, things will happen as they did before, and you and I will come out of it with no more knowledge of where the jewels lie than we have now. Besides, we are by no means sure he's the man. But we'll know in a minute. Throw in the switch. I've only fixed the pointer on the dial by guesswork. We'll have to work up to it, going by what he tells us."

Merwin stepped to the wall and threw a small switch while Dr. Trask slipped the ring back upon the recumbent Hearne's finger. At that instant a subdued humming filled the room and the psychiatrist, holding the subject's pulse, felt an awakening flutter there.

"Tell me what you are doing," he said, speaking directly to the unconscious Hearne.

For a moment Hearne's lips moved without sound, but presently words poured forth in a dull monotone. "I am walking over a wide, yellow plain," he began. "I am leading a small, shaggy pony toward some small huts near the foot of the low, rolling hills in the distance. I am carrying in my right hand a long, heavy stick to which there is attached a sharpened stone——"

Dr. Trask raised his hand and Merwin snapped off the switch. "Too early," said he. "Almost prehistoric, I should say."

He adjusted the pointers on a series of small dials beside the switch. Again Merwin threw it in. Again the subdued humming.

"Tell me what you are doing," commanded Dr. Trask, standing over Hearne once more.

"I am riding a small, shaggy pony saddled and bridled and I am urging him on with spurs at my heels. I am one of a great group of men who ride behind me mounted as I am. In my hand I am waving aloft a short, curved sword and they come shouting after me. We are running toward a line of men kneeling in the snow and pointing rifles at us. There is a flash through the dusk and a crashing report. Some of those behind me fall but I press on. I see the men with rifles closer now. They are in uniforms—ragged and torn uniforms—and their faces are drawn with fatigue and pinched with hunger. Through the snow with a shift of the wind I see a man on horseback standing on a knoll. About him are other men in uniforms to whom he is giving directions. He is short and heavy-set, with a plain black hat turned up over his face in front. One arm he holds crossed before his breast, the hand buried in his tunic——"

Merwin again snapped off the current at a sign from Dr. Trask. "A Cossack charge against French grenadiers," muttered the physician. "Retreat from Moscow, probably. That must have been Napoleon." Again he adjusted the dials and again the monotone from the young man in the chair.

"I am one of a brilliant group of people in a vast hall shining with a thousand brilliant lights. About me on all sides are men and women resplendent in brilliant costume. Some are talking—others dancing. In the distance on a raised dais at the end of the room, with a group of uniformed men about her, is seated a handsome woman of middle age—a woman of regal aspect—beautiful, very beautiful. She smiles and taps one of the courtiers with her fan——"

"The court of Catherine," growled Dr. Trask, signing Merwin to throw the switch. "We're getting nearer," he remarked, shifting the dial pointers again. "Another century or two—all right, go ahead, Merwin."

"I AM walking through the streets of a small Siberian town," began the monotone once more. "I am ragged, unkempt and dirty. I pause now before a house surrounded by a high stockade. About it sentries are pacing to and fro. Peering through an opening between the boards I see a yard with a great house. Before the door and pointing into it is a machine-gun. And here there are other sentries. Out of a side door comes a bearded man of medium stature leading a small boy by the hand. He is followed by two sentries who walk close behind him, always with their bayonets fixed and ready. I—but the sentry outside the stockade drives me away with an oath——"

"Ekaterinburg, where the last of the Tsars was put to death!" cried Dr. Trask, jumping to his feet. "We're only a few days from it now!"

He moved the dials the smallest fraction of an inch; Hearne's voice slurred to an indistinguishable murmur and then took on new volume.

"I am riding in the night," began the voice. Trask pushed the dials once more, this time barely the breadth of a hair, and the voice slurred again.

"I am seated at a table in a peasant's hut," went on the voice. "Across the table opposite me is another who holds a pistol pointed at my breast. In his other hand he has a paper——"

"Describe that paper," directed Trask, his face now gone white, his voice hoarse with emotion.

"It is yellow in color and covered with lines and figures—but he holds it away from me so that I can not see it clearly. It—it looks like a map or perhaps——"

"Yes, yes, go on!" cried Dr. Trask hoarsely.

Merwin had abandoned his post at the switch, and now the two stood over the young man in the chair, their eyes avid with expectancy. "Describe it, you fool, describe the paper!" Dr. Trask almost shouted. "A map—but a map of what?"

"I can not see, but I seem to know that it is the map of—of an island—an island in the Pacific—but the man opposite me occupies all my attention for the moment. He is big and bearded, with a heavy aquiline nose, and there is a scar, a saber scar, livid white, running from the corner of his left eye down across his cheek."

Dr. Trask's hand went unconsciously to his face, where the birthmark, reddish-purple in color, extended from the corner of his left eye across his cheek to disappear in the fringe of the gray imperial at the corner of his mouth.

"If that's you," began Merwin, "he may recognize you when he comes out of it and——"

"Nonsense! His spirit is not yet completely transposed. He is merely receiving pulsations. It will be all dim like a dream to him."

"The room is lit by a candle on the table between us," Hearne was saying. "The light is bad—worse because the gray of dawn is breaking through an opening in the roof. Ah, yes, there is the faint sound of sobbing; yes, there is a boy at the farther end of the room, half crouched in a corner. No, it is not a boy; it is a young woman."

"This is the moment—this is the moment," breathed Dr. Trask.

"I am quarreling with the man across the table," went on Hearne. "We are disputing what is to be done concerning the map and the woman. The big man has just made a suggestion which angers me. I spring from my chair but he raises the pistol and points it at me. 'You are a fool, Boris, to think I would enter into any such treacherous scheme,' he is saying. 'As you say, there are millions to be had by this paper—even billions—all the crown jewels. But even that would not tempt me to betray my trust.'

"'You blackguard!' I cry out. 'What filthy scheme of yours is this now? It was your suggestion that we do that foul thing. The refusal was mine. Who spoke first of betraying the trust? You! Who refused? I! Are you trying to reverse the rôles? What trick is this, Birsk?'

"'Who speaks of trickery?' says my companion. 'Oh, it is useless for me to try and convince you by peaceful means! What say you, Boris, that we fight it out with sabers? He who survives takes all.'

"'It is a bargain!' I cry out. 'I will fight you.'

"The big man gets to his feet. We remove our heavy coats. We each draw the heavy sabers at our sides. We are going to fight it out here by the light of the candle. But the girl protests. She does not want me to fight. She fears the big man. But I have said that I shall fight, and fight we shall. She tells me he was the best saber in the Siberian army. But my purpose is set. Seeing her plea useless, she pulls a ring from her finger and gives it to me as a talisman against danger. It is a ring of heavy, beaten gold——"

"By all the gods—by all the gods—he is most surely the man we are seeking," muttered Dr. Trask.

"We agree, the big man and I," continued Hearne's voice, "that the girl shall mount the table at one side of the room and there hold the candle to give us light. Now we remove our boots, he and I. He strips down to his great, hairy chest and I see there the bunched and corded muscles which tell me his strength is twice my own.

"We begin, under the light of the candle with that pale, lovely face looking down upon us. Our heavy weapons, meeting for the first time, strike fire. Now we cut and slash. Now we

circle warily, each seeking to put the candle-light in the eyes of the other. Around once more we go. He drives in and I parry. This is the sixth time he has tried and lost. I feel that I am getting the better of it. Now I drive my blade in under his guard. There comes a widening smudge of red on his chest and presently there is blood dripping down to mingle with the matted hair on his sweating body.

"The big man has been panting in hoarse gasps for a long time now. He surely can not last. He has found his match. But he is clever and strong withal. He falls—by God!—no, it is only a ruse, for he is up again; this time his point under my guard. His blade glistens as he whirls it upward, but I turn quickly out of its path. Now I slip—I am down—no, it is but a feint—I am up again, pushing him back—back to the wall. Ah, now the light is full in his eyes. From between his clenched teeth come flecks of foam, dropping to his breast and whitening the bloody stain under the matted hair. I cut him again—and again it is only a flesh wound, but a deeper wound this time. More blood in a steady stream. This will surely finish him! The fight is mine!

"But there is a strange light in his eyes. It is not the light of battle; it is crafty and cunning. He is now the fox, no more the warrior. He manages to pull himself out of the corner and circles warily, no longer on the offensive. Is he saving his strength? For what?

"I push him back. Back—back to the table with the candle above him. I shall bring this to a close with a slashing side-cut——

"My God! He has kicked backward with his foot against the table leg. It snaps. The girl screams, and the table totters. She falls and the candle sputters out. Darkness! We are down on the floor, he and I, with my hand at his throat; for I had jumped at him, pushing aside his blade as the light vanished. Now we are up again—now on our knees—now down once more. The gray light of dawn sifting through the aperture overhead shows me his features grayer still under my grasp at his throat. Now he drops his head on my throat and reaches behind him. It is his pistol! I try to block him but he worms out of my grasp and whirls the butt upward, bringing it down across my skull—once, twice, thrice! A blistering, stinging glare of fire in my brain—a groan—and I sink to the floor. The gray about us deepens to midnight.

"The struggle is over. The big man rises. The girl crawls across the floor to my body and throws herself upon it. She calls my name and I can almost read it on her lips in the wan light of day.

"There is the beat of hoofs on the road outside. The big man staggers to the door. There are horsemen there on foaming mounts. He hails them joyfully. He points into the hut, and smiles sardonically. They dismount and enter. One of them helps the girl to her feet. But I do not move there on the floor. I am limp—lifeless. They begin to laugh——"

The voice began to waver. Hearne's hands released the electrodes and they rolled across his knees to the floor. At the same moment his eyes fluttered and then opened wide. Now he stirred and pulled himself slowly to his feet, facing the other two.

Dr. Trask cursed under his breath. "You feel no bad effects?" he asked, returning to his smooth manner.

"None," said Hearne, rubbing his eyes. "Nothing but a slight dizziness in the head. "I had a terrible dream—a terrible dream."

"Yes, the effect would be to you the same as a dream. However, it was stark reality and no dream at all—every bit of it. But unfortunately the spell did not last as long as I should have liked. Just as we were

getting to the crucial moment the elixir lost its hold on you and you came to. I should have given you a stronger dose."

"I don't feel equal to it, today."

"No, we had best wait until you have rested a bit. Tomorrow you will go back into that world and we shall see further what comes of it. Have a good night's sleep and be ready here at the same time tomorrow afternoon."

Dr. Trask led Hearne to the door, and a moment later he was on his way down the stairs. As he came to the outside entrance—it was one of the old brownstone residences in the east twenties—a woman stepped out of the shadows, touching him on the arm. At first, startled by her sudden appearance, he did not recognize her, but a second glance told him she was the girl who had met him at the door of the Trask apartment—Mrs. Trask. Her features were paler than before, and the small hand on Hearne's arm trembled visibly. Again he sensed, rather than felt, that same vague familiarity he had remarked on his first meeting with her.

"What did you see?" she asked breathlessly. "What did you see—in the experiment, I mean?"

"Why—er—there were several dreams," he stumbled. "But the last was longer. I was fighting a man in a small hut——"

"You were fighting him?" she exclaimed. "With a saber?"

"Yes, yes," he replied, gazing down at her with renewed wonder. "And, why—it seems to me you were there, too, standing on a table, holding a candle—but it's all vague, like fading dreams; you——"

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, as though in horror; "then it is you!"

"Only a dream," he repeated. "Why are you alarmed?"

"Tell me," she broke in, "did he—did my husband bid you come again, tomorrow?"

"Yes."

She seized his arm anew. "Then if you love life do not come," she whispered, tensely. "Go far away where he can never find you—out of the city—anywhere——"

"No, no, I can't do that now," he replied. "He—the doctor—said this was no dream but reality and so I must go back seeking her—through the ages."

She broke away from him with a low cry of fright and ran toward the stairs. Following her with his eyes, he spied Dr. Trask standing on one of the lower steps, his saturnine features blazing down angrily upon his wife. Reaching out with one of his enormous hands he seized the cringing woman by the arm and dragged her behind him up the stairs. Hearne heard words, then—angry words and the sound of a blow and a cry of pain.

3. *Merwin Objects*

An hour before Hearne was to call the next day a strange scene was being enacted in Dr. Trask's laboratory—a scene which the young man would have done well to have witnessed. The raw-boned Merwin had that morning assumed an unwonted truculence toward Dr. Trask, and now that the time for further experimentations drew near, he suddenly laid down his instruments and planted himself in front of the psychiatrist.

"See here, Trask," he snarled, "I'm gonna know just what we're doin' before I go any further with this little thing. You been mighty fine explainin' all that stuff to this young fool Hearne, and so long as you control his mind you can bring him back; but when you and me and her and him all go back into that other world—that's another thing. We ain't gonna have no control here, and so how're we gonna get back is what I want to know."

The two men glowered at each other for several seconds. Dr. Trask's hand played idly with a silver bod-

kin which he had just dipped into a liquid at his side. Merwin, noticing the bodkin, suddenly shot his hand to his hip. "None o' that!" he murmured; "if you get funny with me, Trask, I'll plug you right here and now. No fancy tricks on me with them drugs of yourn."

Dr. Trask reddened and an angry light leaped into his eyes, belying the honeyed suavity of his voice. "Really, my dear Merwin," he murmured, "this outburst is most unexpected and unwarranted. I thought I had explained all of this to you most carefully."

"You ain't explained too much of it. If I'm goin' to be foolin' round in that other life, as you call it, I wanna know just where I'm goin' and what's goin' to happen and when I'm goin' to get back. You know damn well, Trask, that when all four of us go into that other dimension there ain't goin' to be anybody here to bring us back where we belong."

"My dear fellow," Trask purred softly, "that is what those pellets in the ring are for. Those are to replace our earthly control. When we have found out that which we wish to find out, then we shall each swallow one of those pellets, and presto—we shall be back here again, safe and sound."

"Yeh, but there's only two pills. And there'll be four of us."

"Yes, but two's enough, isn't it, imbecile? One for you and one for me. We leave him and her back there where they will not be in a position to interfere with us again." Dr. Trask laughed sardonically.

"Well, why don't we swipe the pills, now?" demanded Merwin. "You can give me one and then I'll feel safe. I ain't trustin' you none, Trask."

"You simple fool," snapped Trask, impatiently, "Hearne will have the ring in that life, as well as in this. We know that by what we heard yesterday. We can not carry it with us from this life to that because only our souls migrate. And when the crucial moment arrives in that life, I shall have that ring of his."

"Well, if that's the case," continued Merwin, "I'm gonna know what's goin' to happen, and in order to understand what's *goin'* to happen I gotta know what *has* happened. I got to know, Trask, and any time you don't do just what you tell me you're plannin' to do, then I wanta know the reason why, and if you don't explain it mighty quick I'll bump you off and help myself to the ring. Get that? Now let's hear what all this is about."

Trask shrugged his shoulders in resignation. "You understand what I did yesterday, don't you, Merwin? Remember my analogy of the six tubes? Well, the first time I tried him he was too far out in the dimensions, or too far back in time, according to which way you look at it. I worked back through the other dimensions until I got pulsations from the fourth. You might say that I'd connected him up with his life in Tube 4. When we reached the fourth I found, by what he was telling me, that his is the spirit we've been looking for so long. Ralph Hearne is the reincarnation of Boris Saranoff; there can be no more doubt of that. Saranoff was the man who was fighting the big fellow, Birsk, in that hut on the Markinoff road in Siberia. I have already established to my satisfaction that I am the reincarnation of Gregory Birsk. I saw that same identical scene when I used you as a control and went back myself into Birsk's body.

"Now I have established pretty clearly what happened between those two men, Saranoff and Birsk. They were spies sent by the Allies in 1917 into Siberia to effect the escape of the Imperial Russian family, which at that time was imprisoned by the Bolsheviki in the town of Ekaterinburg. They were only partly successful, for they escaped with but one

of the family—the Grand Duchess Tatiana. The rest of the family was executed, as history will tell you. In addition to the Grand Duchess, these two men were bringing out of Russia a map containing information as to the whereabouts of the imperial crown jewels, which were taken out of the country and hidden on Bakelief Island at the outbreak of the Russian revolution. Bakelief is the westernmost of the islands in the Aleutian chain which stretches between Alaska and the Siberian coast.

"Now Birsk conceived the idea of withholding this map from the knowledge of the Allies, so that in time he and Saranoff might go to the island and help themselves to this vast treasure. To do this, however, it would be necessary to dispose of the Grand Duchess, who knew they had been given the map by the Tsar and so would, of course, tell of it should she ever come out of Siberia alive. Birsk proposed to Saranoff just before they got out of Russia that they should murder her and say nothing about the map on their return, giving out word that she had perished with the other members of her family. This scheme of Birsk's was unknown to the Grand Duchess, and Saranoff did not tell her, as he did not wish to add any more to her misery than she was already bearing.

"Birsk was by no means discouraged by Saranoff's refusal; in fact, he was rather glad of it. It would have been easier for him if Saranoff had agreed to sacrifice the girl, but since he would not, Birsk decided to do the next best thing, which was more in keeping with his desires though it was more difficult and far more dangerous. He planned to get rid of Saranoff instead of the girl. So he provoked Saranoff to a quarrel in the girl's presence, hurling accusations at Saranoff that Saranoff had planned to betray them. These accusations were veiled in such a way that the girl would see they were discussing something which had been discussed before—something to which Saranoff had been a party. Birsk's plan was to kill Saranoff in a duel, afterward telling the Grand Duchess that Saranoff had approached him with a plan for murdering her and keeping silent on the question of the jewels. He would then secure her silence by telling her that the Allies were not interested in restoring the imperial regime but only in getting their hands on the Russian crown jewels in payment for the funds they had already squandered in the Russian debacle. Having sealed her lips until he got her out of Russia and away from the Allies, he would then deal with her as he saw fit, for he was madly in love with her, though he would not have hesitated to murder her if she stood in the way of his getting the treasure.

"The girl's obvious love for Saranoff further whetted Birsk's desire to kill him. Birsk was a Russian duke and had the reputation of being the best saber in the imperial armies, whereas Saranoff was only an obscure captain of artillery; so Birsk was confident the duel would have but a single outcome. He went into it with this idea, only to learn that he was sadly mistaken, that he had an antagonist whose skill was far superior to his own. To save his own skin he had to win by a trick. You were here listening to Hearne yesterday, so you know what that trick was.

"Birsk had acted none too quickly in his own interests; for the duel was hardly ended when a rescue party found them at their hut. At some time during the journey to the rescue ship on the Black Sea, Birsk managed to convince the Grand Duchess that Saranoff had intended treachery, and that he had been obliged to kill him for that reason and that she must not reveal their knowledge of the jewels.

"Now after the war was over and things settled down a bit, Birsk got a number of Russians together and they all went to Bakelief Island, where they established counter-revolutionary headquarters with the Grand Duchess at their head—or ostensibly at the head, though she was in reality only a pawn in Birsk's game. He had expected to do all this alone, but he had discovered that the two chests containing the crown jewels had been sunk in a central basin on Bakelief Island to such a depth that there was no hope of raising them except by some extraordinary means."

"Hell, what a lot of work!" put in Merwin, gloomily.

"Remember he was playing a game for millions—or billions," said Dr. Trask. And then he continued, "He got together quite a group of imperialists on Bakelief. Among them was Count Alexius Karlak, an admiral in the imperial regime. Birsk had to have Karlak's advice as to how to raise the chests, but Karlak could think of no way they could get down to where the jewels were. It seems that Bakelief was of volcanic formation in prehistoric times, but the sea, finally cutting its way into it, had been condensed to steam by the heat and then blew the whole top of the island into the heavens. The jewels were sunk in the inner basin, which was really the old crater of the volcano and hence of great depth. The pressure at such a depth would be too great for any diving-engine then known to science.

"For the time being they were helpless to do anything toward raising the chests, and perhaps the story would have ended then and there had it not been for Karlak. Karlak and perhaps two others on the island were the only ones sincere in their desire to raise the jewels and finance a counter-revolution. The rest of them were a crowd of blacklegs who were in it for what they could get—but you may guess that Birsk had no intention they should get very much.

"About that time the inventor, Shepard—John Shepard—had invented an undersea engine capable of withstanding terrific depth pressures. Shepard was a naturalist as well as an inventor, and he had designed his engine for studying undersea life. Birsk tried to interest him in the project of raising the jewels, but Shepard, who had so much money he could afford to be eccentric, contended that there was enough gold in the world already to keep the nations continually at bloodshed, so he would do nothing to add to the hoard.

"Nothing they could do would enlist his sympathies; so Karlak, who was really a fanatic and would stop at nothing in his desire to re-establish tsarism in Russia, conceived the idea of stealing the engine or diving-bell or whatever it was. This was fairly easy for a bold man. Karlak, as a former naval officer, secured the berth of captain on Shepard's yacht, the *Narcissus*, which had been equipped with the diving-bell. One by one, as he could, Karlak replaced the American crew of the *Narcissus* with men of his own choosing—men from Bakelief, of course."

"But where does this Saranoff come in?" demanded Merwin, impatiently. "Was he killed in that duel along the Markinoff road or——"

"I am coming to that now," said Trask. "Saranoff was not killed, as you may have guessed. He was left for dead, however. He came to some time later, but that blow on the head had deprived him of his memory. Years later he drifted to America and finally to San Francisco. There he was seen and recognized by Karlak, who was preparing the *Narcissus* for that last voyage of hers when they intended to steal her. Karlak had by that time come to doubt Birsk's sincerity, but since the secret of what had really happened on the Markin-

off road was locked up in Saranoff's brain there was nothing to be done about it then. So he shipped Saranoff on the *Narcissus* as a steward, blindly hoping that some day he might find the key which would turn the secret clear to the light of day. Naturally he knew he must keep Saranoff out of Birsk's sight, for Birsk would surely recognize him.

"Now what happened after that was this: They stole the *Narcissus*, as they had planned. They went to the island, gained the inner basin by a concealed channel, and hid the yacht there, safe from pursuit.

"It is at about this point in their history that I want to get Hearne's soul back into the body of Saranoff—and leave it there. Also, my soul will go back into the body of Birsk, yours into the body of Metkanoff, who was Birsk's lieutenant on Bakelief Island, and my wife's back into the Grand Duchess Tatiana Romanoff. You and I, by aid of those pellets in the ring, will return here to our proper bodies when we have learned the exact whereabouts of the jewels on Bakelief. We will leave the other two there. They will be well disposed of."

"But what of the two empty bodies here?" demanded Merwin. "What we gonna tell the police?"

"That's easy. We will simply say they died from causes unknown to us. An autopsy will fail to reveal the slightest trace of foul play. We—you and I—will be absolved from all blame."

"All the same," objected Merwin, uneasily, "I don't see yet why we have to go through all this rigmarole. Now that we know you can get the ring back there in the other life, all you have to do is to go back there yourself, using me for a control like you did in that other experiment last year, and then hunt around for the chests until you find them."

"That's about the way you'd try to do it," sneered Dr. Trask, "and a lot you'd learn!"

"Well, what's the matter with the idea, then?"

"Just this: Saranoff, as steward of the *Narcissus*, was brought secretly to Bakelief, and there in the course of time he got into a duel with Birsk. In the middle of the duel he regained his memory, recognized Birsk, and by superior swordsmanship killed him. Of course, when Birsk was killed his soul was released and I ceased getting any more pulsations from it. That ended it so far as I was concerned.

"Then, as you'll remember, I tried you. You were getting pulsations from Metkanoff's soul, but he was killed, too, and so that ended your usefulness."

"Well, then, how about the woman?" said Merwin, jerking his thumb back toward the rest of the house.

"Ah," said Dr. Trask, "that's just it! She was getting pulsations from Tatiana Romanoff. Tatiana found the jewels; she and Saranoff were together when she found them, but that was just before they died. She and Saranoff were together in some sort of a cavern on Bakelief—it was all dark, so my wife couldn't tell me much about it. But as near as I could make out they were trapped in this cavern by the tide, and then were sitting on the chest—sitting on it, Merwin! Ye gods! But they were drowned, and that ended it, of course."

"How about Karlak and the rest of 'em on Bakelief?"

"All killed—every mother's son of 'em. There was some sort of a fight after the duel. Karlak was killed on the yacht, and the rest of the crowd were caught in some sort of a landslide in one of the island caverns. I figured it out that perhaps they were chasing Saranoff and Tatiana. But I couldn't get much out of my wife, then. When she learned that I was Birsk she got antagonistic, and when the subject is antagonistic to the control, the pulsations are very faint. She hates me now—but I'll fix her!"

MERWIN stared moodily at the ceiling for a moment. "See here, Trask," he exclaimed at last, "I don't yet see why we all have to go back and live through those events once more. That's mighty ticklish business, to my way of thinkin'. Supposin' something went wrong and we couldn't get back to our own bodies—we'd be wanderin' souls then—lost souls. Awful! Now why can't you get another man to go back there while you act as his control? Maybe you could find one who'd know where the jewels were if he was sent back into the body of one of them Russians on that island."

"No, imbecile!" snapped Dr. Trask. "Didn't I tell you every one of them was killed? I got as near to the jewels as I could with my wife. They're concealed in some subterranean cavern on Bakelief. It is necessary that all four of us go back for this reason; the events of Birsk's life, Tatiana Romanoff's life, Metkanoff's life and Saranoff's life out there in the other dimension are as they are. Not one of those persons has the power to change them. But *we* have. One of us alone couldn't do it, but all four together can. Our ability to do so arises from what is called our psychic power. There is a certain force or power, called psychic power, which surrounds the soul of each and every human being. It is a power which is rarely, almost never, used except by mediums and persons endowed with occult powers. Now when my soul goes back into Birsk's body this psychic power goes along with it. I have an unusually large amount of it because I have realized its value and so have developed it. But you also have it, my wife has it, and Hearne has it, though you three have it in lesser degree than I.

"This psychic power is a free agent. It is the only thing in the universe which is not subject to the dictates of what we call Fate. When our souls are near together in space—as they will be sometime after we go back into those other bodies—this psychic power intermingles. It is pooled, so to speak. Being a free agent, it has a very decided effect on the space laws of the universe. If there is enough of it these laws may be temporarily suspended in its presence. Once back in the bodies of these Russians, we shall find ourselves very much hampered in what we wish to do by the laws of space. For instance, if you wished to seize a pistol and kill somebody at a certain moment, you might not be able to do it because of the laws of space. There might be a dimension between you and the pistol, or between you and the man you wished to kill. Your bullet could not transcend this dimension; hence you could not kill this person, even though he were in plain sight to you. You must remember that when we are back there in the bodies of those Russians a very different set of space laws will govern our actions. It will not be the same set of laws which governs our actions here, nor the same set which governs *their* actions there. We shall be between the two, as it were. But in the presence of this reservoir of psychic power which will be at hand when all four of us are in close proximity, we can suspend these space laws for the time being and do what we will. We shall be able to kill whom we will, when we will, and where we will, regardless of the different dimensions of space. Thus, it is my plan, when we get to the point where Saranoff kills Birsk, to reverse matters and have Birsk kill Saranoff. In that way I shall prolong Birsk's life, enabling my own soul to remain in his body until I have discovered the whereabouts of the jewels. Then, by aid of the pellets in the ring, you and I shall return here, enter into our own bodies and then go back to Bakelief Island in an ordinary way and help ourselves to the jewels, wherever they are. Therein lies my reason for wanting you and the others back in

their bodies. I have need of the additional psychic power which accrues to your souls. Is that clear?"

At that moment the bell rang from the hallway, and the two men arose.

Merwin leaned over and touched Dr. Trask on the arm. "I'm with you, Trask," he muttered, "but see to it that you don't try no monkey business with me or——"

The dark menace in his face served better than words for the remainder of the sentence.

4. The Second Experiment

Contrary to Dr. Trask's advice, Ralph Hearne had slept but little that night. Haunting him constantly was that still, pale face, etched on the wall by the wan moonlight sifting through the window in his tiny bedchamber. The next day, pale and haggard, he presented himself at the house of Dr. Trask, where he was met at the door by the psychiatrist himself. There was no sign of Mrs. Trask about the house. Hearne did not wait for directions this time but threw himself into the laboratory chair with a willingness that brought sardonic smiles to the lips of Trask and the burly Merwin.

"This time," said Dr. Trask, drawing forth the phial, "I shall give you a heavier dose than usual because you must remain under the spell for a long time. Ready, now."

He poured the contents of the goblet into the young man's mouth and watched him closely as he sank with a sigh into the trancelike sleep. At a sign from Trask's hand, Merwin threw in the switch.

"Tell me what you are doing," directed Dr. Trask, peering into Hearne's half-closed eyes.

"I am on a ship—a yacht, steaming through sunlit seas. I am carrying a tray with food down a narrow companionway——"

"The name of the ship?" demanded Dr. Trask, his voice tense.

"*Narcissus.*"

Dr. Trask signed for Merwin to throw off the current. "Everything is well set," he gloated, rubbing his hands. "I'll move the dials up a bit—and then for the rest of us."

Merwin went to a closet, from which he pulled forth three other chairs, replicas of the one in which the unconscious Hearne was seated. All of these he placed side by side, connecting them up with wires from the glass-enclosed apparatus on the bench behind them. Dr. Trask hurried out of the room, to appear a moment later carrying in his arms the limp form of a woman. It was Mrs. Trask, breathing heavily, her body rank with the sickish odor of chloroform! Trask placed her in the chair next to Hearne, forced water from a tumbler between her lips and placed two electrodes in her hands. This done, he signed to Merwin to throw home the switch.

"Tell me what you are doing," he commanded the somnolent form of the woman.

"I am seated in a small room with log walls hewn green from the trees. There is an old woman standing by handing me food on a rough wooden platter. Through an open window at my side I gaze out to foggy, windswept space. We are in the air—no, we are in a small cabin on a high, rocky cliff. Below is the sea—gray sea——"

"Bakelief Island," muttered Trask, signing Merwin to throw the switch. "And now for ourselves, Merwin."

They seated themselves in the chairs beside Hearne and Mrs. Trask, gripping copper electrodes between their fingers. Each held before his lips a glass full of water.

"Now," said Dr. Trask.

They tossed the liquid into their mouths, and as they sank back Dr. Trask kicked a small lever with his foot. Immediately the room was filled with a loud humming, as the current passed through the four un-

conscious bodies in the chairs. Four long sighs escaped as from one mouth. Then silence, save for the subdued hum of the current and the steady tick-tock of the clock on the wall.

5. *Phantom Ships*

RALPH HEARNE stood on the deck of the *Narcissus* as she fled northward, a swift, silent greyhound matching her dun flanks with the darkening gray of sea and sky. Until now he had seen everything as through a thin veil of mist—a swift kaleidoscope of events in which he seemed to have no part. There had been a mutiny; he had seen a yacht stolen from her owner on the high seas and that owner turned adrift in an open boat with his wife and children. Then there had come a searing, blinding flash in his brain, followed by swift, rushing blackness which in turn gave way to the open day once more. But now it was different. Whereas before he had felt everything, seen everything but vaguely, now all was clear, distinct and sharply defined against the inner retina of his consciousness. Before it might have been a moving picture in soft focus—a picture in which he moved and took part like the others, hearing voices afar off and moving without volition of his own. In that picture he might have been a phantom on a phantom ship, manned by phantom sailors running in a phantom sea. But now he felt the wind keen and real against his brow and the water swished and hissed under the drive of the ship's propellers in a way that was very real indeed. He stamped his foot, feeling the solid, unyielding deck beneath him, heard the thump of his soles on the heavy planking.

The downward glance brought his feet within his vision. He noticed they were encased in heavy footgear, unfamiliar to him. And his trousers? They were dark blue, whereas he had been wearing gray. What could it all mean? And then it came to him—Dr. Trask, of course. The psychiatrist had said he must give him a heavier dose of the drug than before. Doubtless that was why everything seemed so much clearer.

And then a vague uneasiness stole over him. He became conscious of what he had not been conscious of before in that soft-focus picture. He was not aware before that his clothing—his body—was any other than his own, but now—and it dawned on him in a sudden flash—this was *not* his body. It moved about the decks in a way that confused and sickened him. Without any volition from him it went into the companionway and down the ladder. He felt its lips moving, heard it talking with these others. They called him "steward" and they talked to him in a language which was not English and yet, when he eased up a bit—became less tense—he understood. Russian, of course. Then he observed bit by bit that when he lay back, took things more easily, allowed himself to go hither and yon at the will of this other man's body, he felt more at ease. There was less of a strain, and the sickening sensation faded. When he let himself go altogether it faded entirely. Obviously the thing to do was to fall in with this fellow's wishes—to lend himself completely to this fellow's will.

It was Boris Saranoff's body, of course. It all came back to Hearne, bit by bit. No cause for alarm. Trask had merely given him a heavier dose than usual. Still, it was uncanny. Before in the soft picture he hadn't been conscious of Ralph Hearne—he had felt himself all Saranoff, though these feelings had been faint. Now he felt himself Hearne, separated by a wide gulf from Saranoff and yet in Saranoff's body. What had happened? Had something gone wrong? When would the experiment end? Perhaps somebody else could tell him something about it. None of these fel-

lows—but there was that man on the bridge—Karlak, the captain. He would go and ask Karlak.

He started forward, felt suddenly a blinding stab of pain and then that same sickening sensation. And then without just knowing how he got there he found himself side by side with Karlak.

"Sir," said he, "I didn't realize you were so near. Will you tell me what has happened—why I am here on this ship?"

Karlak smiled. "Oh," said he, "it is a simple matter. The spirit—the soul of Ralph Hearne has been cast out of its own body and back into the body of Boris Saranoff. There are two souls now in Saranoff's body, yours and his. You are conscious of his but he is unconscious of yours. See, he walks about the deck over there quite oblivious of what has happened."

Hearne turned, and to his amazement saw the body of Saranoff walking about the deck several yards away. And then, looking down at his own feet he saw that he was still in Saranoff's body. How could that be? Were there two Saranoffs?

Karlak laughed. "Don't get confused," said he. "Fate has ordained what Saranoff shall do—even down to the slightest step about the deck of this ship. Naturally, when the soul of Ralph Hearne seeks to do something which is not ordained for the body of Boris Saranoff then Hearne's soul breaks loose from Saranoff's body. But inasmuch as no soul may wander about the universe free of a body, then Saranoff's body splits across the dimension. You have it and so does he, though you may be separated by many yards. It is the result of a conscious effort of your will. You feel already a great pain and fatigue, do you not? That is because the cosmic forces of the universe tend to draw you back into Saranoff's body. These forces are like elastic bands—pulling, pulling, always pulling toward what has been ordained by Fate. When you yield to them, and allow your will to be subservient to them, then your soul goes back into his body and the strain ceases. The only reason why you are able to break loose at all is that you are endowed with certain psychic force—it is greater in some individuals than in others—and this psychic power is the only thing in the universe which is not subservient to Fate. Every human soul is born with a certain amount of this power. It may be greater or less."

"You must be another Dr. Trask to know and understand all this," said Hearne, marveling.

"Oh, don't confuse me with the Karlak up there on the bridge. See, Karlak himself is still up there." Hearne, glancing up toward the bridge, saw that he was not talking to the man he supposed, though the being opposite him seemed to be an exact copy. "I am the Spirit Karlak as distinguished from the Karlak on the bridge to whom you thought you were speaking. I am Karlak's universal soul while Karlak himself is an offshoot from me—an individual soul, so to speak."

"But why are you here?" demanded Hearne, puzzled.

"Well, it is ordained by Fate that certain things shall happen on this vessel. It has all been ordered down to the slightest movement that any of these men shall make. No allowance was made by Fate for the coming of a second soul into Saranoff's body. So when that second soul, which is you, try to do something—try to go somewhere—take steps not ordained by Fate for Saranoff—then something must happen. You project yourself out of Saranoff's true body and you desire to speak to Karlak there on the bridge. But it is not ordained that he shall talk with you or with Saranoff at this moment, so something else must happen. You can not speak to Karlak because a dimension of space

lies between you and him—he could not hear you, though you can hear him. Although your soul has been thrown back into Saranoff's body you are not fully in the same dimension as he. You are in what is called the *inter-space dimension*—which is a dimension—a sub-dimension, if you will—lying between your own world—the world which you just left—and Saranoff's world. This inter-space dimension is what you in your world call the Fourth Dimension.

"Now in the Fourth Dimension the will of the individual plays a much more important part than it does in the three-dimension worlds. Hence, when you exert your will to speak with Karlak you can not speak with the individual Karlak, who is separated from you by a dimension, but you can speak with that part of him which is in every dimension, and that part is his *universal soul*. Hence your will to talk with me summons me to your side, for I am Karlak's universal soul. I am what might be called a true spirit. I am the Spirit Karlak, you might say."

"But why do you come in Karlak's form?" asked Hearne.

"Because you willed it so. When you thought of speaking to Karlak you had a picture of him in your mind's eye. Hence you see me as he is. And furthermore it is a law of the universe that no soul shall go about space without being clothed in some form or other. That does not apply to lost souls—they lose all form and wander through eternity, subject to no law save the law of pain and suffering."

"I begin to understand it all, now," said Hearne, with a sigh of relief. "I was beginning to worry. I thought something might have gone wrong with our experiment back there in my own world. I was afraid I might not be able to get back to my own world, my own body."

The face of the Spirit Karlak went suddenly very grave. "You have a great deal to worry about," he said. "As a matter of fact you are in a very dangerous situation. If I were you I should seize upon the first opportunity to get back to my proper body in my proper dimension."

"Why is that?" asked Hearne.

"Just this, my friend. Your soul came into this dimension by means of the individual soul of Boris Saranoff. But should Saranoff die, as I know he will very soon, and you are not yet returned to Ralph Hearne's body, then there will be no way for you to return. You will be a lost soul wandering without form through space and subject to great mental agony and torture because you will be out of harmony with the universe and hence will have no place in it. It is the real hell. Go, I say, make haste—return before it is too late."

"But Dr. Trask can bring me back. He is my control."

"Dr. Trask can no longer do so. He has himself come into the Fourth Dimension to occupy the body of Gregory Birsk, of which his own body is the reincarnation. He has brought two others with him. He can not, and will not, bring you back."

"Can't you advise me?—can't you tell me what to do?—can't you see what is to happen?" demanded Hearne in a panic.

"I can foresee for the others on this ship," said the Spirit Karlak, "but for you the future is veiled to me. I can tell you only what has already happened to you and those others of your party. I can tell you that they are here in this world with you and they mean you no good—at least two of them do not With the woman, it is different."

"Mrs. Trask?" demanded Hearne, horrified.

"Yes, she is here—against her will, however. There is a way out of it for you. You see that ring on your finger? On Saranoff's finger? Ages ago, as you would say in the three-dimension world, there was a Russian

astrologer who worked out the true theory of the Fourth Dimension and the transmigration of souls just as Dr. Trask has done. As a matter of fact he was a previous reincarnation of Dr. Trask. But he went farther than Dr. Trask in that he hit upon a drug which enabled him to dispense with earthly control when he went out into another dimension. He made this drug into greenish pellets and concealed them in a ring so that it should always be with him. He died, in time, and only two of the pellets were left. Before his death, however, he had written up his experiments and left them in the archives of the Kremlin at Moscow. Dr. Trask discovered them. Meanwhile the ring containing the pellets had fallen into other hands. Its true meaning was unknown, but because of its peculiar workmanship it came to be a Russian Imperial heirloom, supposed to be a talisman against danger. It was given to Saranoff by Tatiana Romanoff. He now wears it. Take one of the pills, my friend, and be off with you ere it is too late."

"But Mrs. Trask," Hearne cried; "what of her? By God, man, I will not go back and leave her here to face it alone."

The Spirit Karlak shrugged his shoulders. "Be it on your own head, then," he murmured. "I have warned you. I can do no more."

"Is there no way I can control Dr. Trask's action?" asked Hearne, in desperation.

The Spirit Karlak nodded, thoughtfully. "Remember what I have told you about the free psychic force which gathers about every soul? In its presence the events which Fate has ordained may be broken. You could not do it alone—your psychic power is not sufficient—but when you and Dr. Trask and his lieutenant, Metkanoff, and Mrs. Trask are all together near each other, this same psychic power is pooled, ready to the hand of whoever uses it first. All together you might break through and change Fate. But remember one thing—although you may break the course of events, substitute events of your own making—the tendency always is for events to snap back into place as Fate ordained. Therefore, if by the pooling of your several psychic powers you are able to prolong the life of Boris Saranoff beyond the point where it has been ordained he shall die, then you must watch out; for it has been ordained he shall die, therefore Fate will see to it that he is killed at the first favorable opportunity. For example, you might, because of your psychic power, prevent his being drowned—as it has been ordained—but at the very moment of his getting out of the water in safety a rock might fall off the cliff and kill him. Do you understand? His death, having been ordained, would be brought about at the very next favorable combination of circumstances."

"I think I understand now," said Hearne. "During the first experiment by Dr. Trask I was only receiving pulsations from Saranoff's soul while my own soul remained in its proper body. But now, for some reason, Dr. Trask has thrown my soul out of my own body into the body of Boris Saranoff so that I am completely cut off from my own body. I foresee that I shall have trouble with Dr. Trask in this world. Could I do anything against him, physically? Could I disable him, kill him? Would he be immune to a bullet, for example? Could I take a pistol from Saranoff's world and kill Trask, who comes from another world?"

"You could, subject to certain laws of space," replied the Spirit Karlak. "But everything must come to you through the hands of Boris Saranoff's true body. For instance, you couldn't project yourself from Saranoff's body and go down to the gun-rack in the cabin and take one of the rifles there.

You couldn't touch that rifle because you would be separated from it by a dimension of space. But if Saranoff himself went down and got the rifle, then that rifle would be available to you *so long as it remained in his hands. You* could do what you wanted to do with that rifle regardless of what *he* did with it, *so long as it remained in his hands.*

"The situation is this: when your soul came into the body of Boris Saranoff every atom in his body split, making two bodies where there was but one before. In one of these bodies his soul lives; in the other is yours. The two bodies are identical even to the clothing and the articles in the pockets. It was this second body which housed your soul when you thrust yourself forward to speak to me. It will continue to house your soul until either you are killed or Saranoff is killed—and then it will be destroyed. If you return to your own body it will be reabsorbed into Saranoff's body without being destroyed; the atoms will reunite and there will be but one body once more. You might call the body which houses Saranoff's soul his true body, but that does not mean that the one which houses your soul is by any means a false one in your sense of the term, though we'll call it that for the sake of clarity.

"Now, as I have already intimated, Saranoff's true body and his false body are identical in every respect even down to the contents of the pockets and the clothing. But you must remember that you are in one dimension whereas he is in another; hence a dimension separates these two bodies. That is why you in the false body can not reach across the dimension and take the rifle which is in the rack below decks. You might project yourself down there but you could not touch the rifle nor anything in the room.

"Now as soon as Saranoff *touches* the rifle and *so long as he is touching it* the atoms which make up that rifle split as did his own body and there comes to be not only one rifle for him but also one for you. Saranoff might be standing with his rifle on his shoulder but you would not be bound by what he was doing with it so long as some of his body was touching it. You might take it and shoot it at what you would, though he stood motionless with his."

"Could I shoot anything I liked?" asked Hearne.

"No, the bullet you fired would naturally be subject to the same space laws as the body in which you are. You might fire point-blank at Karlak up there on the bridge or any of the others on this ship but you couldn't hit them. They wouldn't know it. But you could hit persons who are moving in the same dimension as you are now. You could hit Dr. Trask, for example. Trask is now in Birsk's body on Bakelief Island. Supposing you came upon Birsk while the rifle was in your hands; you could shoot at Birsk and the bullet would kill Trask, though Birsk would know nothing of what had happened. And if Trask had projected himself out of Birsk's body you could fire at Birsk's false body in which Trask was and kill Trask. By the same token Boris Saranoff could take the true rifle and shoot at Birsk and kill him, but in that case it would be very bad for Trask, because, Birsk's soul being released from his body, there would be no way for Trask to get back to his own world. His would be a lost soul —a possibility I have just warned you against."

"I see," said Hearne. "Anything we in the Fourth Dimension do does not affect them but everything they do affects us."

"Exactly. But I must tell you one thing more. Don't think that so long as Saranoff has the rifle in his hand there is a limitless supply of rifles available to you. Should you lose *your* rifle you can not still have it

just because he hasn't lost *his*. But on the other hand, if he loses his then yours is lost also. It doesn't work both ways, you see. Therefore I warn you not to lose the ring. There are really two rings now—one for you and one for him. But if you lose yours you can not help yourself to his. But if he loses his then yours is lost with it."

"Dr. Trask is subject to these same laws. I can't see that he has any advantage over me."

"Ah, yes. But remember that Trask understands this thing far better than you do. He will not make the mistakes that you will make. And furthermore he has a much greater psychic power than yours and hence he can project himself out of Birsk's body over greater distances. He will have more freedom of motion beyond Birsk's body than you will have beyond Saranoff's. You can not go much more than a few yards out of Saranoff's body without suffering tremendous strain. Trask could go much farther before he would be obliged to relax back into the body of Birsk and rest. And he understands pretty thoroughly the value of the psychic power. He has developed his own psychic power about to the limit for a person who has little but hatred in his nature. If his were a loving nature he could go much farther. In that case he might almost be able to change Fate unaided by the psychic powers of other persons. Love is the greatest dynamo of psychic power."

"I don't see how he or anybody else could alter Fate without breaking down the laws of the universe—the laws of space that you have just described to me," put in Hearne.

"Of course not, my friend. But that is precisely what can happen. In the presence of sufficient psychic power the laws of the universe—the laws of space—may be suspended. Thus, if other earthling souls like yours were on this ship in close proximity to each other and the pool of psychic power were sufficiently great, then you could do almost what you wished. You could, for instance, go down into the cabin, seize a pistol and come up here and shoot any one of the men on these decks whether they were from your world or not. The psychic power transcends space. It is the only thing in the universe which is not subject to immutable law. More than that, it can, temporarily at least, suspend immutable space law.

"But I see, now, that you are suffering intensely from the mental strain of projecting your soul out of Saranoff's real body. You had best go back and rest there. You can call on me again when you please."

"I think I shall do so," said Hearne.

The Spirit Karlak raised a warning finger. "Remember you can not wait too long. Your road back to your own world lies through the soul of Saranoff and that soul is soon to depart, for he is doomed."

HEARNE, relaxing with a sigh of relief, found himself once more in the body of Saranoff. He looked around, but the Spirit Karlak had vanished. The *Narcissus* had been running since daybreak through thick blankets of fog which lifted occasionally to show the sea dancing in the sunlight but came down again soon as though loth to allow them a full hour of clear weather. Saranoff was going forward and so Hearne relaxed fully, permitting his mind to be carried wherever the Russian willed. Saranoff was on the bridge now, but Karlak, and another officer, Brillitz, the second in command, paid no attention to him, being absorbed in working the vessel through the murk ahead. There was another here too, an American, whom Hearne, through Saranoff's mind, knew as Hillis. Hillis, as he remembered it now, was an employee of Shepard, the owner of the *Narcissus*, and had been kidnaped with her, doubtless to be em-

ployed in the working of the diving-bell with which the yacht was equipped. It came to Hearne then, for the first time, that all Saranoff's knowledge was his own; he had even talked to the Spirit Karlak in Russian, though that tongue was unknown to Ralph Hearne. Doubtless they might have spoken in English, for the Spirit Karlak, being for the most part omniscient, would understand that tongue too.

The thick gray mist which enshrouded the *Narcissus* was rolling upward once more, and Hearne heard Karlak tell Brillitz that Bakelief Island should not be more than an hour's steaming ahead. Just then the wireless operator stepped out of his cabin abaft the bridge and hurried up to Karlak.

"We've been sighted, sir, by two United States destroyers. They order you to heave to, sir."

Karlak shrugged his shoulders. "Brillitz," said he, "tell them to give her full speed ahead."

The fog now spun high, leaving the yacht in the brilliant clearness of the sunshine. Following Karlak's glance astern, Hearne saw two smudges of smoke on the horizon. A half-hour later their funnels appeared above the ocean's rim, pouring forth great clouds of smoke.

"Land ho!" came a cry from the lookout in the crow's-nest of the *Narcissus*.

"Bakelief," muttered Karlak. "Give us the fog again and we shall lose them easily."

At that instant there was a puff of white vapor from one of the destroyers and a shell shrieked across the bow of the *Narcissus*, plunging into the sea with a slender geyser of water shot heavenward to mark the spot. Directly in her course the fog was now settling down once more like a thick gray curtain shutting out the small blot on the horizon which marked the headlands of Bakelief Island. Into this blanket of swirling grayness they plunged at full speed, the curtain draping down about the wake of the yacht and leaving her alone on the ocean once more. As Karlak had hoped, the fog had blanketed them from the view of their pursuers.

At that instant out of the murk to starboard, rushing like a great lion from its cave came a ship under full steam. The *Narcissus* lay directly in her path. Hearne saw that less than fifty yards of sea parted the two vessels. A crash was inevitable. Saranoff, however, was standing there gazing at it without a flicker of emotion; so Hearne, thinking the Russian had suddenly fallen asleep in his tracks, shouted a warning to Karlak, but that grizzled mariner paid not the slightest attention, his eyes still riveted on the swirling mass over the *Narcissus'* bows.

Hearne saw the men on the decks of the approaching vessel run forward; heard faint cries of consternation and an instant later her siren gave a faint blast—so very faint that Hearne could scarcely hear it. Her helmsman had obviously jammed her wheel hard down, for she began to swerve sharply. But the intervening distance was too short. The *Narcissus* lay full in her path.

Hearne screamed another warning to Karlak, and then threw himself flat on the bridge deck, awaiting the crash.

It never came. Gazing up in stupefaction he saw the onrushing vessel pass completely through the *Narcissus* just abaft the funnels! Not a creak, not a shiver from the yacht! Not a sound save the throb of the *Narcissus'* engines! The yacht, as it seemed to Hearne, should have been cut through from rail to rail, and yet she steamed on quite unscathed!

Glancing about him, Hearne saw that he was once again out of the body of Saranoff and that while he lay on the deck Saranoff stood above him, paying not the slightest heed. And

then he realized he had done something which Saranoff was not to do. Hence he had projected his soul in the counterpart of Saranoff's true body. He thought of the Spirit Karlak and in that instant he saw the Spirit Karlak standing beside him. He got up, bewildered.

"Did you see that?" gasped Hearne.

"Oh, that coast guard cutter? Yes, I saw her."

"But—but what happened? They rammed us."

"Nothing happened, my friend. You see we're moving in the Fourth Dimension and they in the Third Dimension and so they couldn't possibly hit us. To make the matter clearer to you I'll say that some eighty odd years intervened between the moment when the *Narcissus* crossed this spot and when that cutter crossed it. So you see, we're well out of their reach."

"But they saw us; they swerved."

"No, they didn't see us exactly. You see, this ship is separated from them by the Fourth Dimension, but the presence of your soul, with your free psychic power on board has affected the entire ship to some extent. The *Narcissus* has been given a kind of vague outline, a sort of earthly nimbus which makes us partially visible to their eyes. Naturally, because of the fog, they thought we were real, so they tried to avoid a collision. They'll go back now and report that they sighted a phantom ship. That ship was in your own world."

"Then that explains why people in my world sometimes see ghosts," said Hearne.

"Exactly. Some disturbance of the ether or a great increase in the psychic power of some soul loitering in the Fourth Dimension gives visible form to them and then your eyes see. Of course Saranoff and Karlak and the rest of them on board here saw nothing. That ship didn't exist so far as they are concerned."

"Now if one of those shells from that destroyer hit us, would that go through us without harm?" asked Hearne.

"No, indeed. Those destroyers are moving in the same dimension as the *Narcissus*. They could sink her if they got near enough. But they will not. We are very close to Bakelief now, and within the hour we shall have entered the passage between the cliffs. This passage is concealed from the sea; it leads into the inner basin, which was the crater of Bakelief when the island was a volcano. Once we are in there, the whole United States navy could not find the *Narcissus* unless they used airplanes, and even then it would be doubtful, because flying in these latitudes is extremely dangerous."

The thrilling events at Bakelief Island and the efforts of Dr. Trask to change the course of Fate will be narrated in WEIRD TALES next month

The SOUL TUBE

by STUART STRAUSS

"The man sprang directly at him."

THE snow had turned to rain, and back to snow; fine powdery flakes, that cut into the old man's face, stinging him as he walked, slowly dragging one twisted foot down the nearly deserted street. The snow and wind bit through his thin clothes, numbing his old body, and caking in the deep folds of his wrinkled face.

Now lights began to glimmer in the dusk of the early winter evening. These lighted homes showed cheerful rooms and warm, comfortable people.

The old man shivered and drew his shabby coat closer about his thin chest. Silently and slowly he tramped along, kicking up little white clouds where the snow had drifted in his path. Farther and farther behind him he left the brightly lighted section of the city. The streets grew more narrow, the houses older and more decayed, almost meeting across the way. On and on he went, until the streets became alleys, and the houses mere deserted ruins. Here the snow was thick and white, unscarred by footprints; white as a winding-sheet that had wrapped this dead city in its folds.

The silence of the place was as deep and still as some quiet pool at midnight, and as the old man paused before one of the houses, and rapped with a heavy bronze knocker, the reverberations echoed down the still

court, and then, like the ever-widening rings in a pool where a stone is cast, softly died away.

From inside the door came a noise of dropping of chains. The house itself was as dark and dead as ever; not a light appeared at any of the blank, paneless windows that frowned out into the street. However, the door opened a crack, and the old man skulked through. Behind him the door closed softly, and outside was nothing but stillness and decay, and the softly falling flakes of heavy snow.

The interior of the house was both dark and still, but the old man, hugging the wall, kept forward. There was no sign of the person who had opened the door. The hall was black and silent, and as cold as the street outside.

Following the winding corridor, now this way, now that, now climbing stairs, now descending flights of steps, the old man made his way, constantly keeping as close to the wall as possible, limping slowly, painfully, but always certainly forward.

The twisting hall finally ended before a blank white wall that seemed almost to glow in the darkness. Softly the old man ran a long-fingered bony hand over the wall's surface, and suddenly, with noiseless precision, it divided in the middle. He hurried through, and the door closed silently behind him.

This second corridor was dimly lighted; it was straight but long, stretching away and growing almost invisible in the deep shadows. The old man with the crippled leg no longer hugged the wall, but walked jerkily down the center. At the end of this corridor was a wall similar to the first. This, too, opened, and closed without a sound after he had passed.

This second hidden door opened into a room—a huge chamber, floored in black and yellow marble, in strange design. There were no windows visible, and the walls from ceiling to floor were hung with black and yellow velvet curtains. In one corner, giving the only illumination, was a huge gold lamp on a dull black pedestal. In the center of the room was a large black screen, on which designs were drawn in gold. Save for the screen and lamp, no furniture was visible, and no one was in this silent place of black and gold. The old man was indeed an incongruous figure amid this somber richness, with his shabby clothes, his frayed linen and broken boots, and his scraggly whiskers wet from melted snow.

He clapped his hands together sharply, twice. One of the yellow curtains was pushed aside, and a huge negro, all of seven feet tall, entered, folded his hands across his breast, and with bowed head stood waiting. The old man, without turning, spoke: "I am to have a visitor tonight, Ki. You will meet him at the outer door and bring him here. Number One already has his instructions, and remember, little one, keep close to the wall beyond the third door."

Apparently this amused him, for he cackled hoarsely—a peculiar coughing laugh.

"And remember, behind the ear—behind the ear! Begone now, for he comes soon."

The negro bowed, and was gone.

The old man, still chuckling hoarsely to himself, limped slowly across the room, and vanished through another curtain, leaving the yellow lamp to glow evilly in the now deserted room.

The empty and decayed houses frightened the well groomed young man who hurried along, carrying a heavy traveling-bag. The place was so old, so lonely! The dim flickering of old gas lamps here and there only accentuated the darkness

between them. The old houses with their broken windows and gaping doors, their flapping shutters and tumbled-down chimneys, were both desolate and grimly terrifying. He paused irresolutely, about to turn back, but he had given his word, and had been promised something in return, and this fact drove him on. He knew that the city was very old, and that parts of it had fallen into disuse and had been allowed to rot and decay. But he had never realized until now how badly the years had treated this section of the old town.

From the warm South had he come some months before. Now he longed to hear the murmur of the wind in the palms, the soft lapping of the water on the beaches. How he had swum and played all through those lazy, happy years! But how cold it was now; the wind bit even through his heavy ulster. Damn this country, anyway! But he had no one to blame but himself for being here. He had always longed to see this town; so he had come. Job after job he had held, only to lose them. The North had no place for a lazy Southerner, who wished to take his time in all matters. Only this afternoon he had been given the blue envelope. After his rent was paid, he had only a few small coins to jingle disconsolately in his pockets. He had been wandering along, wondering what he was going to do, when a hand touched him on the shoulder. Turning, he saw a little, crippled old man, hobbling along beside him.

"What's the matter, son? You look discouraged."

For some reason the younger man found himself drawn to this little old man, and was soon pouring out his story of his failure to hold work, of his homesickness, and all the other matters that troubled him.

"And you haven't been here long?"

"No, I haven't. About three months."

"And you don't know anyone here?"

"No, sir; I haven't had time or money enough to make friends."

"Too bad that, too bad! You have a fine figure, my boy. Something of an athlete, I suppose, able to take care of yourself in any kind of trouble."

"Well, I played football in college, and I can ride and swim; was intercollegiate fencing champ, also."

"Well now, that's fine. You don't dissipate, do you—drink, or such like?"

"Not much; puts you in bad condition."

"Fine, fine! And you haven't any work? What a pity! And you don't know anyone here, and don't want to stay here. Fine, fine!" chortled the old man, rubbing his hands. "How would you like to have a position taking care of an old man—a sort of nurse companion? Pay you well, and you would go South for the winter."

The young man was taken aback at such an offer. Either this ragged old man was crazy, or he himself was demented. Such offers were not made upon a city street. The old man, looking slyly up at him, seemed to see the thoughts in his mind. "No, I am not crazy. The man who employs me is, to say the least, a bit eccentric, and it was his idea that I should do this: Go out upon the city streets until I met a young man, friendless and jobless—a young man who needed help—one who had no bad habits, and the airs of a gentleman, with the body of an athlete. You have fulfilled all these qualifications, save one, which I have not mentioned. The man must be fearless and able to face danger without flinching. Can you face death—even be prepared to meet trouble more than half-way? My employer is always in danger of attack. He is very wealthy, very sick, and very

much afraid. What he needs is a man who can protect him."

The young man laughed. Here at last was what he had come to this city to see, and that was excitement. Turning to the cripple, he said: "I am sure I can fill the position. Not that I am particularly brave, but I have never been called a coward."

"Good, good," said the cripple, and from some hidden place in his clothes brought forth a dirty card. "Here is my employer's name and address. Be there tonight at 10 o'clock sharp. And here is something to buy you some decent clothes. Buy the best, and have yourself carefully barbered. Buy a bag with some extra clothes for travel. Look well, and I am sure the place will be yours."

From another pocket he extracted a wad of bills. These he pressed into the other's hand. "I will see you later, my young friend; and until then, good-bye."

It seemed that he melted away into the crowd—here for a moment and then gone, leaving the other with a dirty card and a handful of money.

The young man looked on the card, and on it was written: "Asa Cheeney, 119½ Fish Court." Counting the money, he found that it amounted to almost five hundred dollars. Surely this mysterious Mr. Cheeney must be eccentric indeed to employ such a ragged ambassador, who gave so much money, and asked such queer questions. Well, he would play the game to the end, no matter what might befall him.

After a visit to a barber and a haberdasher, he once more made his appearance, but with what a difference! For a moment he stopped to admire himself in a huge mirror. It had indeed been a long time since he had dressed like this.

He glanced at the new watch on his wrist. It was nearly 7 o'clock. He would have time for dinner, and a show afterward; and then on to Fish Court.

He chose for his dinner one of the most elaborate of the many restaurants in the heart of the city. The dining-room with its low lights, soft music, glitter of silver, glow of glass and shining expanse of white linen seemed wonderful to him after months of dirty lunchrooms or noisy automats. The well groomed men and women around him were vitally interesting. Here was a world with which he had lost touch—that pleasure-loving, careless world; and he was once more about to become a part of it.

With his after-dinner coffee he fell to thinking about the position he was to take. This Mr. Cheeney, who needed a brave man afraid of nothing—who were the people he feared, who made his life dangerous? Who was he? What had he done? What did he look like? Would he himself be unafraid? Would he pass the approval of the man? And where was Fish Court—down near the waterfront somewhere? A queer neighborhood for a rich man! But then a man who hired crippled and ragged old men and went about his work so mysteriously was not accountable.

Outside the snow was whirling about. Now and then a gust of wind rattled the heavily leaded panes. He shivered. How he hated this snowbound, wind-racked country! But soon he was going South, and would leave behind all the things he hated here. For some reason he felt sure he would satisfy the queer old man's qualifications.

The yellow lamp in the room behind the third door glowed brighter for a moment, then winked out, only to shine softly once more. The flickering and dying out of the lamp was as if some current had been snapped on and off momentarily. From behind one of the black curtains came a strange sound

—a metallic clicking and purring, with now and then a sharp staccato beat. In the midst of its whining and singing, the hidden machinery ceased, and a bent little figure scurried into the room, wheeling before it a table on which were odd-shaped metal rings at each of its four corners. This table was placed behind the screen. Next, a chair was placed near it, and the screen was rearranged to hide them both. From a hidden recess a huge leather armchair was drawn close to the screen, and arranged so that anyone using the chair might be seen and heard by one behind the screen.

Next, the bent little old man lifted from the wall one of the heavy curtains. As he pulled it back there was revealed a huge, masklike carving of a face with great, flapping ears more than six feet long and three feet wide. This huge image covered the entire side of one wall. He pressed a concealed button; the closed eyes of the idol opened, and green rays of light shot across the room. Satisfied with his inspection, the bent little man closely examined the yellow lamp, and in its rays he was shown to be a wizened Mongolian, with a dried, parchmentlike face, so lined that, save for an eaglelike nose, no one feature was prominent.

After touching the lamp here and there, he dropped behind the black curtain from which he came. The hidden machinery started once more, and again died down into stillness.

The snow was still falling in eddying swirls as the young man left the restaurant, carrying the heavy traveling-bag he had been instructed to bring. The doorman called a taxi for him.

"Drive me to 119½ Fish Court, and hurry, please," said the young man.

The taxi chugged off. On and on through the city went the cab, passing from the brightly lighted section to a place where dim street lights were few and far between. Farther and farther it went toward the oldest section of the city, and finally stopped. The driver hopped out and opened the door.

"This is as far as I can go, sir," he said. "Beyond here it is too narrow for a car to pass. Fish Court is about three blocks straight down this street. I'd be careful if I were you, sir. Down a short way it's supposed to be deserted, and no one hardly ever goes there. But I've heard of strange goings-on. You see, most people reckon there's a hidden arm of the river running through that district. Lots of houses have tumbled down for no reason, and most people are afraid to live there. Too, it's awful old—three hundred years and more. Perhaps I shouldn't say it, sir, but I don't fancy to have you go there. Fish Court is no safe place after dark. Better go back with me."

The young man stepped out of the cab, paid his fare, and tipped the driver generously. "Well, anyway, sir, I'll wait here a while for you, because you may come back."

"Thanks, my friend, but that won't be necessary. I am expected here. Good-night."

As he started down the dark street, the departing chug-chug of the taxi rather annoyed him. It was as if he had cut his last bonds of kinship with the world. Despite his brave front, the darkness, dinginess and desertion of the place got on his nerves. The whiteness of the snow only intensified the grimness and solitude of this section of the city.

Fish Court was at the very end of the street, an alleylike cul-de-sac. It was a semicircle of old houses that towered black and dreary above his head. A battered street sign hanging on an old post showed him he had reached his destination. In none of the houses were lights visible, and he did not know how he was to see the number of the place he was seek-

ing. One after another of them he tried, by the aid of a flickering match, but they showed no number. House after house he tried in this great semicircle of desolation. Finally, with his matches almost exhausted, he came to the largest and shabbiest house of all.

Walking up the rickety porch, he struck a match over a huge brass knocker, which seemed to grin evilly at him in the flickering light. It was a devil's face; the horns and drooping eyes and pointed chin were rarely done.

From a window inside the house at 119½ Fish Court two pairs of eyes that gleamed in the dark watched his hesitating progress. A voice, high and nasal, whined through the dark in some strange tongue. There was no reply, but the voice ceased as though it had been understood.

The booming of the knocker against the door startled the young man; for the noise, though expected, was at variance with the deep stillness of the court. Hardly had the knocker fallen than the door was opened, and from the darkness came a high-pitched voice. The English was perfect, but with a peculiar aspirate sound that denoted a person not born to the tongue:

"Come in, sir; the master is awaiting you."

The man outside stepped through the half-opened door, which closed with a dull sound. Then came the rattle of chains, and the noise of a bolt being hastily pushed home. The young man found himself in total darkness, so black and thick that it seemed as though he could cut it with a knife. From out of the darkness two pairs of eyes like those of animals glared at him. Then the voice spoke again:

"The master wishes you to pardon the lack of lights, but he does not want his living here to be known, so we must live in darkness. Please follow this man here. He will take you to our master."

Suddenly he spoke in a quavering, singsong voice, in a language the other had never heard. Then, in English, the unseen one spoke again:

"You, oh Ki, will conduct our guest. Here, sir, take hold of his girdle, and follow him, and remember, keep your shoulder to the wall as you go down the corridor. Remember, keep your shoulder to the wall!" The voice of the unseen speaker stopped in a ghastly, choking laugh. "Keep close to the wall and follow Ki."

As they proceeded down the inky black hall, the young man's eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, and he could make out the shadowy figure of a giant of a man, whose girdle-ends he held firmly in one hand; in the other hand he held the heavy traveling-bag he had been asked to bring. But as far as seeing his path was concerned, he was as blind as the proverbial bat. He only knew that his shoulder constantly rubbed a rough wall, and that he and his silent guide climbed up and down an innumerable number of steps. However, it seemed to him as if they were making steady progress forward. Now they twisted in one direction; then, suddenly, twisted off into another. He soon lost all sense of direction, and followed blindly after his hurrying guide. Once he stumbled over something that lay in his path, and only his tight clutch on the other's girdle kept him from falling. He lost his hold on his bag, and heard a dull splash, as if it had fallen into water. He tried to stoop to recover it, but his silent guide did not pause, and perforce he had to follow.

Far down the length of the corridor he saw a gleam of white, and soon they brought up short before an unbroken expanse of white wall that shimmered in the darkness. His almost invisible companion ran a

huge hand over this wall, and silently it divided in half to let them through. As he stepped through the door in the wall, he heard it slide noiselessly back into place. Behind this door was another corridor, not dark like the others, but dimly lighted. Where the light came from he had no idea, for there were no globes visible. The light, although dim, illuminated the hall as far as he could see.

For the first time he had the opportunity to see his strange guide, and strange he was indeed—a huge negro, dressed in a long yellow robe, with a hood that hid his features. Without a word, the negro hurried down the hall, no longer keeping to the wall as he had done previously. The man called after him: "Where are we, and where are we going?" But the other made no reply; so, shrugging his shoulders, the young man followed.

It seemed to him that this second corridor was longer than the first. He had no idea of the distance they had traveled, but he did know it had taken quite a considerable amount of time. This corridor, too, ended abruptly before the same kind of blank wall; and it, too, parted to let them enter.

Now the man found himself in a room lighted only by a huge, golden yellow lamp, in a far corner.

In the room no furniture was visible, except a huge leather armchair, facing a black and gold screen. This color design was carried out all over the room—on the floor, the hangings, and even the ceiling. The hangings were of heavy velvet, and masked the apparently windowless walls.

His silent and mysterious guide relieved him of his hat and overcoat, but for some reason would not take his walking-stick. Without a word, the negro vanished behind one of the yellow curtains, leaving the other alone in the room.

He studied the place curiously. Surely this man Cheeney must be very peculiar. Never had he seen a room so furnished. In some way it reminded him of pictures he had seen of Oriental palaces. The absence of windows and doors puzzled him. Surely there must be other rooms behind those heavy draperies. Why such lavish and barbaric display in this most western of cities? Evidently Cheeney had lived for many years in the East. The whole arrangement of this room, his peculiar servants—all fitted into this idea; all, save the ragged old man he had met on the street. This was another puzzle. Where in all this somber richness did the old man have his place? Where in this home straight from the *Arabian Nights*, with its secret doors and dark tunnels, did this very old and very commonplace man enter? What was his position? What position could he possibly fill?

In thinking of the old man, he wondered about himself. A nurse companion, the old man had said; one who could face danger unafraid. It must be from the East that the danger Cheeney feared would come—a vital and real danger, for otherwise there could be no sense in such mummery.

Without warning, the room was plunged in darkness. From the blackness shot out two beams of green light. Turning to face them, he saw one of the most ghastly things he had ever seen. Across one wall was a huge face—a cruel gaping mouth, and great ears that flapped back and forth. Its two great, green eyes glared almost directly upon him. As he stared at the thing, from behind one of the huge ears ran a dark figure, which in the green light he saw to be a man, clad only in a golden loincloth, and brandishing a curved

sword. This man sprang directly at him. Almost unconsciously he swung his stick to guard the blow, and with a clever fencer's trick sent the simitar flying. Disarmed, the other turned and ran back toward the wall and disappeared.

As suddenly as it had gone out, the light in the yellow lamp came on brighter than ever. Still grasping his stick, he looked around. There was no mask with flashing eyes; there was nothing but curtained wall. All was as before, and he was alone in this room of black and gold.

"That was very nicely done, my friend. You are a very clever swordsman." The voice came from behind the screen—a cool, rather amused voice, with a timbre in it that sounded vaguely familiar. The hidden speaker went on: "You must pardon my little trick. It was just the final test, to see your fitness to fulfil the position of my companion. You will forgive me if I do not come out to greet you, but for the present it will be impossible. Sit down, please."

Behind the screen the hidden man clapped his hands thrice, and from behind one of the black curtains there came a little old Chinaman, who with head bowed stood silently awaiting his orders.

"Bring wine and cigars, Chu, and see that our guest is made comfortable."

Without a word the old man bowed low and withdrew.

"Now, my dear fellow. I am Cheeney—Asa Cheeney, and you seem to be just the sort of person for whom I have been looking—young, brave, and, as far as I can see, nearly physically perfect. You have, I understand, no family ties, no friends, and you wish to leave this part of the country.

"Now a word concerning myself. I am very old, very feeble, and in great danger, so do not think your position will be an easy one. What the danger to me is, you will learn later. Ah! here is Chu with the wine and cigars. I hope you will like the wine. It is very old, and very rare. Chinese. Glance at it—green as jade. Smell of it—sweet as jasmine. Drink of it—tart, but wondrous."

The young man took one of the tiny cups—queer, square little things, slightly larger than a thimble—and also a very thin, very black cigar.

The voice behind the screen resumed speaking. "Judge not the wine's quality by its quantity. Emperors have paid with their heads for but one drink of it. Never before has it been out of the Far East, never even been out of a certain abbey hidden high in the Himalaya Mountains. Many years I spent there, among the priests who know many things. I learned many secrets—too great a number, perhaps, for one man. That is why I am hiding here in this hole in the ground. Rather neat, though, don't you think? There is more that I will show you later.

"How goes the wine? Such clarity, such fragrance! Oh my friend, it is the very wine of life! And the cigar—do you like it? My own brand. Is it not fine also? Black as night, strong as death, sweet as love. All this should go into the making of a fine cigar."

The young man sipped his wine. How cool it was, how green, like a piece of jade, just as Cheeney had said! It was cool, yet it seemed to flow all over his body, almost numbing his hands and feet, yet leaving his brain as clear and bright as usual. The cigar was the best he had ever smoked. What was it the man had said about it? Clever, that; he must remember it. The wine was now numbing his entire body. He was afraid he was getting drunk—but why did his head stay so clear? Usually it was affected first. He tried to straighten up in his chair.

and found he could not. It was as if he were held in a vise. He tried to move a hand, and it would not follow the direction of his brain. From behind the screen came a rasping laugh, half chuckle, half cough:

"The wine is working, my young friend. Said I not that emperors had paid with their heads for one drink of it? It is a secret compound that deadens the motor nerves of the brain, yet leaves the rest of the brain clear, even more active than ever. Now we will come to business, and so you will see me, but not for the first time."

There was a dragging noise from behind the screen, and from around it came an old man, who dragged one twisted foot. So that was where the ragged old man fitted into this place! But he was no longer pitiful or shabby. He was dressed in a long Chinese robe of black silk, heavily embroidered in gold. The scraggly beard was gone, the cringing air was gone; instead there was now an air of mastery and purpose. The eyes almost flamed with hidden lights; the pupils were pin-points of command.

"So we meet again, and I hope in more pleasant surroundings; and in a moment you will know why you were asked here."

Again he clapped his hands, twice, sharply. From behind the curtains stepped the great negro who had acted as the younger man's guide.

"Prepare our guest, oh Ki, for what is expected of him."

SILENTLY as ever, the negro rolled from behind the screen a long table on which rings were fastened in each of the four corners. Upon this he lifted the motionless young man, and with a few motions placed the rings about his wrists and ankles. The crippled old man rubbed his hands together.

"Ki is a marvelous servant. Dumb, but hears every word I speak."

The negro laughed a gurgling laugh, and opened a cavern of a mouth, in which there was no tongue.

From behind the curtained walls came a queer, purring noise, with now and then a metallic tinkle. The lamp in the room glowed low, and then flamed brightly.

"Before you see what is prepared for you," went on the old man, "I want to tell you a story. Years ago, as a young man, I went into Asia, to Tibet. I don't suppose you have ever been to that devil-ridden country, perched high among the snow-capped mountains. Why I went there we will not mention. However, for years I lived in a Buddhist lamasery, and I learned many things —some good, and many very evil. It is indeed a very secret land, a place forbidden. Those old yellow priests know secrets best left unrevealed; things that we in the West are just now discovering. As I learned more and more, so was I kept more and more a prisoner. But one day I managed to escape. For days I wandered over the snow, hungry, tired, more dead than alive. But those silent yellow men caught me, and gave me this." And Cheeney stuck out the twisted foot.

"You know they have a nice little pastime of cutting off the soles of your feet, very delicately, very gently, so finely that the very refinement of it makes the pain worse a thousandfold. They did other things—things which I can not even bear to remember.

"But later I escaped again. By that time I had learned the language perfectly. Disguised as one of their begging friars, taking with me only the old Chinaman Chu, whom you have seen, I made my way into India, where I found Ki, very sick, with a disease no one there could cure. At one time, my friend, I was a doctor, and if I do say it myself, rather more than an expert surgeon. I cured Ki, and he has since that day

become my shadow. At one time he was in the sultan's palace, but being indiscreet, he lost his tongue.

"Go where I might, I have been constantly followed since then, always shadowed. So far I have escaped death by hiding here in this section of the city. Here have I made a wonderful home, for I have become rich through what I brought back from the East. But I am tired of hiding like a rat in a hole. I want to go out into the world, unafraid, with the fear of death not always clogging my footsteps, and that's where you come in, my dear boy.

"No one could ever find me here, and if anyone did find me, he would die. You remember that after you entered my door you were made to hug close to the wall. Well, that is because the center of that hall is a river, a long-forgotten one; and a false step, or an ignorant one, would mean death. You are now several blocks from where you entered, and far below the ground, and the way you came is the only exit or entrance.

"I choose you to help me for these reasons: first, that you are young and strong and clean; second, that you are alone and friendless, and no one would miss you if you disappeared. And, my friend, you are going to disappear."

The old man laughed that rasping half cough, half laugh. He motioned the negro to take the table away.

"Take our guest to the appointed place. I will join you in a moment."

The negro wheeled the imprisoned man through one of the curtains in the wall. The old man, left alone, hobbled, chuckling to himself, in the opposite direction. And he, too, disappeared behind the curtains.

As he was wheeled along down another corridor, the young man heard the purring and whining of the machinery growing louder. There was now distinguishable a hissing sound as if some current were suddenly switched on and off. A door was opened by the bent old Chinaman, and he was pushed into a room that reminded him, unpleasantly, of a hospital, and yet was different. It was all of white tile, with huge, shaded electric lamps. Two operating-tables stood side by side. They were connected by many small, fine wires that completely covered each one. At the front of each table was an upright post of peculiar greenish gray metal into which ran all the many wires. Connecting these two posts was a hollow glass tube of a deep purple color that glowed deeply now and then, and from which the hissing noises came. In the corner of the room was a motor with a number of dials and buttons on the face, not unlike a high-powered radio receiver.

The young man was lifted from his carrier and placed upon one of the tables. Over his mouth was strapped a metal disk similar to that which held the glass tube. Other plates of the same metal were strapped to his left arm, and over his heart; a metal cap was placed on his head. During all this time he could not move a muscle. The effect of the wine was still strong upon him. But he could see and hear as clearly as ever. Strangest of all, he was not frightened. For some reason, while he did not know what was going to happen, he did not care. He was undoubtedly in the hands of some wealthy madman, and nothing could save him. But at least he had had a few hours of pleasure, some entertainment, and had been granted what he was always seeking—adventure, mystery and excitement.

The crippled old man now made his appearance, and was bending over him. The old man had taken off his golden robe, and was garbed in the frayed and dirty garments and cracked boots of their first meeting. He was speaking.

"Now for the final step. Up there in Tibet they have learned how to interchange bodies; that is, the soul or mind, call it what you will, can cast off its own body and enter that of another. I learned the trick of it, and that is one reason why my life is in danger. But their method has one drawback. The change of soul from body to body is not permanent. It lasts for less than an hour, and upon the return to its original body, sickness and near death is a sure result. However, I have discovered a way to make this change permanent—not through will power, as they do, but through the greatest force in the world—electricity, combined with certain light rays. I have found out how to release the soul, and transform it into another's body. I will not bore you with a recital of the experiments I made, the years it took me to perfect my invention. But now I am certain—nay, positive—it will succeed. You are there on one table. I will be placed on the other. Our left hands will be fastened together. The metal will be placed over my lips as it is over yours. By the way, this is the most curious of metals. It is only found in a certain part of the world, and contains the elements of all metals in one. Now observe the glass tube. See how the sparks in it are white, and cross and recross each other, but never blend. You have a chance no other man has had—that of seeing your soul leave your body. When the tube becomes a smoky gray, and the sparks change from white to red, and fuse into one instead of crossing and recrossing, then your soul and mine will be in that little glass tube. You will see the tube bend and twist as though alive, as the souls interchange their places. That is all you will see. Later you will awaken as an old man with shabby clothes and a twisted foot, and I will be strong, and young, and well dressed, but my mind will be my own, clear and keen, and keeping all the knowledge I have ever learned. Only my body will be changed."

Turning to the negro he said, "Come, place me on the table, Ki, and you, Chu"—speaking to the Chinese—"to the dials as I have instructed you. Now, my friend, there is only one danger: if the tube should break, our souls would escape from the tube, and as they are unable to enter our bodies, we should be dead. Remember, it is better to be an old man alive, than a young man dead."

The old man climbed on the table, and was fastened down, and the wires were attached. The arms were fastened together. The humming of the motor took on a lighter note. The lights in the purple tube swayed and twisted. The young man lay looking at the tube. He had no sense of being; it was as though he were outside himself, watching these strange rites. The purple tube grew smoky; the sparks turned to red; the tube twisted and bent; but now he could no longer see.

From his bent position the wrinkled yellow man rose, and went over to the tables, watching the graying tube. With a gesture of his hand he sent the negro from the room. For some time he stood silent, and then in a curiously clipped, but correct English, he began to speak:

"You can hear me, oh Master of a Thousand Devils. So hear what I have to say. For years I have awaited this moment. Yea! For years I have been the dust beneath your sandals. But now, do you remember when I begged you to take me from the monastery? Oh blind son of a pig, you did not know that I had been instructed from the brothers to follow you and bide my time before I paid you for the insults that you offered us. Know now—and see if you can laugh—that never have

you been followed; that all this hiding like a rat in a hole has been my scheming; that I, and I alone, have held your payment in my hands, and now you pay. You who would debase our secrets for your ends, learn now that we never forgive or forget."

From his waist he drew one of the huge wooden rosaries used by the Lama priests. Swinging this high over his head, he brought it down on the hollow tube. There was a burst of flame, a strangled, muffled cry, and from the ends of the broken tube two clouds of grayish vapor poured out.

The wrinkled old yellow man, with shuffling feet and head bent down, clicking his rosary as he went, opened the door and passed through. Gently he closed it behind him, leaving the two still figures alone in the white-tiled room.

Promise for My Enemy

***By* C. T. LANHAM**

Walk warily! The shadow at your back
May lunge and strike at any moment now.
Hate perseveres and patience is a black
Beatitude in Lucifer's old vow.

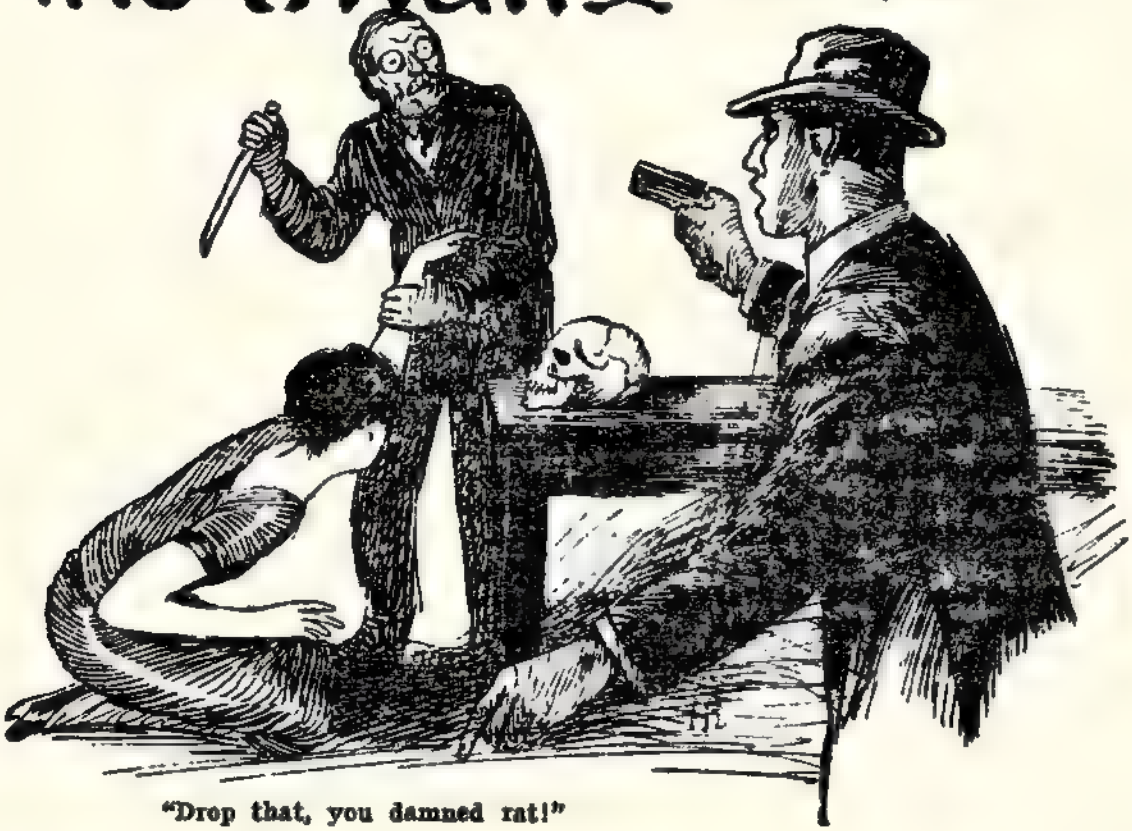
Sleep lightly! Nightmare stalks the quiet tomb
Of shackled sleep in shapes beyond a name.
The hounds of hate leap up through night's slashed womb;
Behind them cracks a flashing whip of flame.

Dine cautiously! A dash of powdered glass
Or some swift cyanide may cause your fall.
Hierophant is hate in Hell's high mass
Where I will celebrate your festival.

But dare not die! A grave is six feet deep,
No more. And I make solemn oath that I
Will toss your mongrel soul on prongs of sleep
Until it welcomes high Hell's sullen sky.

The Cult of the Skull

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"Drop that, you damned rat!"

DR. GLAZEBROOK came back into the room where I had been waiting for his analysis of the small bottle's contents. His comment, while it did not altogether surprize me, was revealing:

"Who is your enemy, Mr. Carey?" There was a grave background to the slight smile which accompanied this question.

"It was poisonous then?"

"Rather! Why, there's enough vegetable alkaloid in these four ounces of yellowish fluid to ruin a pair of mastodons."

I had, it appeared, acquired an enemy. It seemed extraordinary, for I had only seen the little bearded man twice and our conversation had been merely businesslike. The first time had been when I picked up his brass key; the second when I had asked him about my winter cold. Perhaps I had better begin at the beginning.

That beginning had been commonplace enough. My cousin, Peter Ellis, had gone to California for the winter. Peter is a bond broker and can manage trips to California. He had loaned me his New York City apartment on Waverly Place, and I had been getting in some hard licks at a story about ships for *The Daystar*. The story took me frequently among the wharves and shipping, and that was why I happened to be walk-

ing along West Street the time I first saw the little bearded man. He came rushing around a corner, his ridiculous little bandy legs fairly flying. He just avoided a collision with me, ducked past, and skipped across a side street like a lamplighter.

Just as he dodged a heavy motor truck he dropped something that sparkled. I picked it up as the truck's swearing driver rattled past, and hurried after the little man to give it back. It was a small brass key, such as might be used to lock a valise. He was taking five steps to my longer-legged two, and I had to run to catch him. In the middle of the block, I tapped his shoulder and he shrank away from my hand, presenting a face pallid with apprehension. I held out the key to him, and he snatched it and dodged ahead before my words: "Is this yours, sir?" were out of my mouth, giving me such an ugly look that I regretted the trouble I had taken with his key.

It was raining, a February drizzle, and I charitably attributed his bad temper to the weather. It had a worse effect on me, for that night I was coughing and sneezing, and after a restless night I decided to see a physician and get myself vaccinated for colds. There was, I remembered, a doctor's sign, "Bernard Bruso, M. D.," in the window of a small, old-fashioned house which I passed daily on my way to West Street and its shipping. Next morning I rang the bell of this house.

A colorless, old-fashioned housemaid admitted me and showed me into a dingy, first-floor waiting-room where I had barely time to take in my surroundings before the double doors leading to the room in the rear were pushed apart and yesterday's little bearded man stood in the opening.

We stared at each other in the dim light of a dull day coming through dirty window-panes, and I was sure I could detect some shadow of that apprehension which had answered my shoulder-tapping of the day before.

The doctor shook his head at my suggestion that I be vaccinated. He dissuaded me in a slightly foreign voice.

"That," said he, "may be undertaken a little later. It requires a day to procure the coryza serum. Meanwhile I will make you up a mixture which will relieve your cold; oh, yes, it will relieve it."

He looked at me so maliciously as he said this that I immediately thought of poison! The double meaning of his words pressed home upon my mind. I put the idea away from me. It was an absurdity, of course; an outrageous thought.

When the little doctor disappeared into his surgery through the double doors I could just see him through their crack. In the surgery on a center table stood a case about the size of a typewriter cover. With what looked like the same little brass key I had returned to him he unlocked this, removed the top, and there stood an old brownish skull. A skull is not, of course, unusual in the office of a physician, but it struck me as unusual that he should uncover such a trophy at this moment. Then a spasm of coughing seized me and when I looked back again through the aperture between the folding-doors, I was seriously surprized.

For the little man of the brass key with the queer beard and the bandy legs was actually kneeling on the floor of that surgery in front of the brown skull and making obeisance to it with his high-domed forehead knocking against the edge of the table as a savage might salute his totem.

What strange rite had I stumbled upon, I wondered! I applied my eye to the crack where I could get a closer view of what was going on in there. It came over me that I had blundered into something devilish, something uncanny. I could feel one

of those uncomfortable chills of contact with the unexpected run up my spine and down again. A moment later he rose and busied himself filling a four-ounce bottle from several larger ones which stood in great numbers along shelves in the farther end of the surgery. When he returned to the front room I was idly looking out of the window at a wet and dismal street.

I turned at his arrival and he handed me the bottle. He gave directions:

"Take the half of this, tonight, in an equal quantity of water, upon retiring, preferably after you are in bed and well covered. You will then —sleep. Should not your cold be cured in the morning, you repeat with the remaining half. You understand?"

I nodded and handed him a five-dollar bill. He returned me three ones. His charging me the usual office fee somewhat modified the second double meaning of those directions. "You will then—sleep!" Somehow, it had a sinister sound which stuck in my mind. He showed me out without another word and slammed the front door behind me.

I WALKED over and took the Elevated uptown to Eighth Street. I like the Elevated. It is one of the few remaining features of New York City which is old-fashioned and still in use. Back in the apartment between coughing spells I cogitated. This was a mighty curious business, putting it all together, it seemed to me. The little doctor was plainly an eccentric. But, absurd as it seemed, I could not rid my mind of the idea of poison.

At last, telephone-book in hand, I looked up an analytical chemist. There was one, Hugh Glazebrook, D. Phar., on Bleecker Street. Telling myself meanwhile that I would do much better to stay where I was in the steam heat, I struggled into my hat and ulster once more and took a taxi to Bleecker Street. I handed over the little bottle and asked for an immediate analysis.

I went out of the laboratory with that phrase of Dr. Glazebrook's ringing in my ears. I had an enemy. Why, I wondered! What had I done to incur the enmity of the little bandy-legged doctor? Nothing, so far as I could see.

I returned to my cousin Peter's apartment, and my cough was so annoying that I gave up the idea of any work for the day and made myself comfortable in the largest armchair near a sizzling radiator with a glass of Peter's pre-war cold medicine. While I absorbed my hot toddy I turned my mind to finding some solution for this eery mystery into which, unwittingly, I had managed to step. One thing was plain. Since I could not guess at any solution, investigation was clearly indicated, tomorrow. My story for *The Daystar* would have to wait; I was going to run this thing down to its roots.

The next morning my cold was broken. Besides, the sun, though rather a watery sun, was shining once more. As I was dressing an idea occurred to me. I carried the bottle, with "enough vegetable alkaloid to ruin a pair of mastodons," into the bathroom, and poured out half its contents. I had determined to go straight to the doctor's office. If he had meant to poison me, I would mystify him by pretending I had taken half the bottle as directed. I grinned to myself over this stratagem.

I ARRIVED about 10 o'clock and was again shown into the waiting-room. After a brief wait the folding doors opened the same as yesterday, and Dr. Bruso looked through. When he saw me his face went a dead white and he clutched the edges of the old walnut doors for support. Apparently he had not expected to see me

again! I took the half-empty bottle out of my pocket and held it out toward him.

"Good morning, Doctor," said I, cheerfully, "you see I didn't need the second half of the medicine. But I thought I might as well come in and let you look me over again."

The color began to come back into his drained face. He swallowed several times, making a great effort to compose himself. When he spoke at last his harsh voice was trembling, guttural: "Give me the bottle!"

I handed it to him and he looked at it curiously, then again at me.

"You seem—better," he added.

"I am. Much better, thank you, Doctor."

He looked at me cannily.

"You will, however, be needing a tonic, no?"

"I am in your hands, Doctor. Make it a tonic, by all means."

He peered at me, as though he found it hard to realize that it could really be I, his heavy brows puckered into a puzzled frown. It was evident that he did not know what to make of me.

"I think a tonic would be a good idea," said I, encouragingly.

He turned back into his surgery without another word, slamming the doors so hard that they rebounded, making a wide aperture for me to look through. He went straight to the bottle-shelves, ignoring the skull this time, and uncorked and sniffed gingerly at my bottle, shaking his head. He poured out what was left into a slate sink, rinsed the bottle from a faucet, and dried it, after shaking out the drops. Then he selected a new bottle from his shelves and filled the bottle once more.

Just as he was sitting down at the center table to write something on the label the house-bell rang, and the dilapidated maid showed in a young girl of about eighteen accompanied by an older woman, apparently her mother. Apparently Dr. Bruso had other patients besides my casual self. The two women sat down near the window and conversed in low tones.

I gathered from snatches of the conversation that the girl had been here before, and from the mother's tone that she was reassuring her concerning some kind of an ordeal which was before her today. I determined to make their presence the occasion of a little preliminary investigation, and half formulated a plan which I was later able to put into execution, as it happened.

When Bruso returned, as he did shortly, and gruffly refused any further payment, being plainly anxious to get rid of me, I said that I would let myself out, and went straight out of the room and through the hallway populated with ghosts of generations of corned beef and cabbage. I slipped the catch of the front door, slammed it behind me, and then, to make my departure unmistakable, turned to the left instead of to the right, and walked slowly past the waiting-room window. I even thought I could see Bruso glancing out at me, out of the corner of my eyes, but could not be sure as I did not want to look up. As soon as I was safely around the corner I paused, fumbled through several pockets as though I had forgotten something, turned, and retraced my steps.

I opened the front door, replaced the catch, closed it noiselessly behind me, and stepped carefully along the hallway to the waiting-room door. There I paused, listening. I could just catch the gruff voice of Bruso, slightly lowered. "There is no need for you to remain," he was saying.

Not an instant too soon I slipped around the rear corner of the hallway and stood on the landing of the steps leading below to the basement, nearly choking with the odors of ancient cooking in that stuffy place.

I was hardly in my hiding-place before the door to the waiting-room

opened and the doctor showed the older woman to the front door, which he shut after her and almost ran, with those absurd little rapid steps of his, back into the waiting-room. I stepped warily out of my refuge and resumed my former position by its door. I determined, in case anyone came along, to be just leaving the doctor's, and so felt safe enough. No one did come in the door or along the hallway, however. I listened closely and was rewarded by hearing Bruso tell the girl to follow him, and, a moment later, the bang of the double doors.

The door opened silently under my pressure. I stood in the waiting-room. Only my instinct justified this intrusion. But I was morally certain he meant some kind of harm to this young girl. He had tried, deliberately, to poison me. I could, perhaps, say I had come back to ask directions about the "tonic," if I were discovered now. I felt, reassuringly, the small, flat, automatic pistol in my pocket; a weapon which I had been licensed to carry ever since my reportorial days. With it, and my acquaintance at police headquarters, and what I already had to go on in Bruso's case, I should not hesitate to deal adequately with Bruso if the occasion should arise.

Once more my good fortune held. Those folding doors stood, once more, slightly ajar. I approached them silently, and peered through.

The little doctor was standing with his back to the center table, and close against it. Both hands were behind his back, and with the left, which was nearer to me, he was twisting the small brass key in the lock of the skull case. He turned it at last, and withdrew the key, which he dropped into the pocket of his coat. It was only then, when he shifted his body slightly to speak to the girl, standing between him and the shelves of bottles, that I noticed his right hand. This clutched a long, cruel-looking knife which lay on the table behind him, and as he called the girl to him I swear I saw his height increase before my eyes, although this was probably nothing more than his act of rising on his toes to get a greater physical purchase for some act about to be performed.

As the girl approached him, he flung off the cover of the case, and stepping aside and so exposing the skull to her gaze, cried out:

"Behold!"

The girl looked at the ghastly thing, her eyes widening; and then at once, brandishing his knife, the little fiend was upon her. Using only his free left hand, he seized and somehow twisted her in that malignant grip until she was on her knees before the grinning brown thing. He had the knife raised in an unmistakable gesture before I had flung one of the heavy sliding doors wide, stepped into the surgery, and held him covered with my pistol.

"Drop that, you damned rat!" I shouted, and the knife rattled on the old brown hardwood floor.

He crouched, and leered at me, his bearded lips drawn back in a kind of animal snarl.

Seeing him thus disarmed, I dropped the automatic pistol back into my coat pocket, and reached for him with my gloved hands. He bit at my wrist and I struck him heavily across the lower jaw with the back of my fairly heavy hand. Then I took him by the neck in both hands and, lifting him bodily, shook him according to the name which had leaped to my lips—like a rat.

Suddenly he went limp in my hands, and I dropped him in a heap and turned to the girl, who was still on her knees, my attack having occupied no more than a few seconds. I raised her to her feet and seated her in the nearest chair. Then I turned back to Bruso, now dragging himself to his feet, and a new idea occurred

to me. I would try, now, in the thick of this sordid adventure, to get at the heart of the mystery back of these insane performances. I reached out and picked up the skull, holding it, a thumb in the eye-socket, as one holds a bowling ball.

It was surprizingly heavy, far heavier than I had imagined. Evidently there was something inside it. Well, it would answer my purpose the better for a little extra weight! I poised it aloft.

As I did so I had a glimpse of a horrified, distorted face twisted into an agony of protest, and then Dr. Bruso literally fell prone upon the floor and groveled at my feet abjectly. A thin sigh came from the young girl, and her head drooped forward upon her breast. She had fainted.

I stood there in that position for an instant, so surprized that I did not know what to do. The girl was out of the proceedings now, for the time being; that horrible little beast was brushing the dusty floor with his scraggly beard; and I was holding an old brown skull aloft ready to hurl it. I pulled my ideas together. My ruse had worked more rapidly than I had expected.

"Get up!" I thundered, "and sit in that chair beside you and answer what I ask you!"

Bruso scrambled to his feet without a word, his face dead-white, and sat on the edge of the chair.

"Attend to her first," said I, "and then send her away."

He nodded comprehendingly, rose, bent over the young girl. I stood, watching them, the skull still ready to hurl. The girl's eyelids fluttered under Bruso's ministrations; in a few moments she was awake and looking about her with a terrified expression. Bruso led her into the waiting-room, I watching them narrowly. He helped her on with her cloak and took her to the door into the hallway. She went out and he came back obediently. It was evident to me that holding the skull I held a very effectual whip-hand over him.

"She is gone," he muttered. "There was a cab in front of the house and I told her to take it."

I motioned to the chair and he sat down.

"Now," said I, "you have considerable to explain. Do you expect any more patients?"

He shook his head. I closed the double doors and faced him.

"Now tell me exactly what you are up to, and tell it straight. Otherwise"—I drew the "tonic" bottle out of my pocket with my free hand and set it on the table—"otherwise this will go down your throat and not mine, and we'll see what effect it will have!"

"I will tell you all—all!" he protested earnestly. "I tried, of course, to kill you. There is too much at stake to risk allowing you to live. I knew your picking up the key was not mere chance. That disturbed me, much. When you came here with your cold the next morning—then I was certain!"

"Certain of what?" I interrupted.

"That I was discovered," he replied simply.

The purely unconscious touch of melodrama about this word "discovered" gave me a hint how to carry on my inquisition. I laughed—a dry, hard, Successful Villain's laugh.

"You were," said I. He nodded, dismally.

"Yes, it was plain to me from the first; your appearance here this morning proved it. I saw that I must work very quickly to accomplish——" He paused and looked at me haggardly.

"Yes?" I encouraged his recital.

"You will observe," he resumed, leaning forward in his chair very earnestly, and moistening his lips, "that the—skull—has no teeth—yes?"

I had not observed it, but I nodded nevertheless. His earnestness appeared to increase.

"The teeth—are inside! He had all his own teeth because he died young. He was twenty-five. Wilkes Booth's teeth, also, are there, and those of the poet Keats. Those of the young king Edward Sixth of England—they, too, are there. They were drawn the night before the burial by his uncle Seymour who was of the Cult and handed on secretly from hand to hand until they came to Myles Warrington of Devonshire who was then the Keeper of The Skull. The teeth of Edgar Allan Poe are there—it was he who wrote the strange tale of the thirty-two teeth which is the Clue, and which all save those of the Cult have supposed to be the work of a clever madman! No, they could not penetrate the Clue!"

To say that I was astonished would be to put it very mildly. I was simply taken off my feet with this extraordinary rigmarole. Teeth! The teeth of Poe; of that young son of Henry the Eighth who "died of a consumption" at fifteen; Wilkes Booth, murderer of the martyr Lincoln! But if it put my brains in a whirl, I kept a good control of myself, for this, as it happened, was not the first strange tale of mortal queerness that had come to my ears. So I merely nodded at this apparent madman as though such matters as these were everyday affairs to me.

Bruso resumed: "At Weimar the Skull rested for many years in the studio of the Abbé Liszt, that great master of the pianoforte. I had it myself from Rasputin. It was he who placed within it the teeth of the young Rabbi Elias of Minsk, known as 'The Worker of Wonders.' The Skull is nearly full now. The Time is almost at hand!"

He paused, almost dreamily, carried away with his narrative, his eyes on the ground, his body relaxed.

"The time for what?" I enquired. He roused himself.

"For the world-revolution," said he and fell silent again, broodingly.

"But—but," said I, "what, in the name of common sense, have these teeth to do with your 'world-revolution'?"

"They have everything to do with it. They are its symbol. The world-revolution can not come to pass before the Skull is filled."

I was by now convinced that I had to deal with a plain madman. He seemed at this moment to be in a quiescent mood. Insanity is like that, periodical, as I understand the matter.

"And what, please," I asked quietly, "has that young woman to do with it all? Just how is she connected with the 'world-revolution'?"

"I was about to initiate her into the Cult of the Skull," replied Bruso simply. "Her sympathies were with us. She has been here often. She was in no danger. I would only have offered her blood to the Skull—a mere ceremony. I underwent it myself, many years ago. It is our requirement for all initiates."

"But yet I do not understand how this skull—these teeth which you say are inside it—has 'everything to do' with this world-revolution. Can you not explain that?"

"It is," replied Bruso, "the skull of Perkin Warbeck, the patron of world-revolution, of him whose spirit animates us who are of the Cult. Our master, Warbeck, was hanged in November, in the last year of the Fifteenth Century, and his skull was procured by the founder of the Cult, who was an officer of King James the Fourth of Scotland. Warbeck our master prophesied that so soon as his skull should be filled with the teeth of those who hated governments, then would the world be ripe for a revolu-

tion such as no man had before conceived."

"Then," said I, "this world-revolution you speak of can not take place until this skull is full of teeth. Do I understand you correctly?"

"You understand it aright," answered Bruso, nodding his high-domed head in my direction.

"Well, then," I fairly shouted, "there will be no world-revolution, my queer friend!" I raised high above my head the ugly thing to which all this time I had been hanging on, and hurled it down with all my strength on the hardwood floor of the surgery. It smashed into fragments at that impact, and about the room in every direction flew—teeth? Not so. Jewels! Jewels of every size, kind, and description. They must have been packed into the ancient skull with extraordinary care. There had been no rattling within the skull, and I had held it in my hand for perhaps ten long minutes while I listened to Bruso's queer rigmarole.

When he saw what I had done, the doctor uttered a dismal shriek. I saw his face distorted, like a Greek mask, with despairing rage and horror. He leaped toward me and I covered him with my pistol. I was taking no chances with this extraordinary madman. But, although for an instant I hesitated over the question of dropping him in his tracks, it was not at me that he had launched himself in that desperate plunge. No—his objective was my "tonic" bottle! Even as I stepped aside, my instinct telling me to hold steady and wait, he had seized the little bottle, uncorked it with the speed of thought, and emptied its contents into his mouth.

At once he collapsed to the floor; writhed once beside the table while I looked down on him, horrified; bent himself spasmodically backward, and then lay quite still.

This was all so sudden, so grotesquely strange, that I found myself, seconds later, holding my weapon so tightly that my knuckles were white and aching when I realized what had actually happened. I dropped the pistol back into my pocket, leaned over, and felt his face. He was, unmistakably, dead.

There was not the suggestion of a sound in the house. The surgery was as silent as a tomb. There, scattered all about the floor, were the many fragments of the old and brittle skull. And everywhere were jewels, a king's—an emperor's—ransom! I wondered, momentarily, if the wild tale of the skull were not, impossible as it seemed, substantially true! Or, was it a very clever ruse intended to disguise the late doctor's activities as a "fence"? I mean, of course, true in its main details; the jewels, which he had called "teeth," the sinews of war for some actually planned world-revolution. The young girl? Possibly the emissary of some local "Red" society, bearing another jewel to be added to that grim collection. Well, I should never know!

I was down on my hands and knees in that silent room, gathering and depositing in the surgeon's black leather bag which had stood all this time on the table's edge, handfuls of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires. . . .

I am reasonably certain that I got them all. I spent a feverish quarter of an hour over this work of salvage. These stones would never finance any Red revolution if Edward Carey could help it!

I finished, so far as I could see. I stood up again and hefted the black bag. Only fragments of the skull, and Bruso's distorted body, remained on the floor. There was nothing further for me to do, it seemed.

I stepped out through the folding doors, shutting them quietly behind me. I left the house, without seeing

a soul, closed the street door, turned to the right and walked to the Elevated station.

The Cult of The Skull was ended, finished. There would be, certainly, no world-revolution. This, it seemed to me, carrying that innocent-looking black leather handbag, was the best of all possible worlds, just as it was!

I SAT, a little later, in my cousin Peter's apartment, trying to estimate how much I was worth. It was hard to say. I was no jewel expert. The only fly in my ointment was—well, olfactory! It takes a long time for the ghost of the black leather handbag, I learned, to dissipate itself after the bag itself has been burned in a grate fire. I had raked out the metal fittings, the lock and hasps, and the steel forms which had braced the edges. Those I designed for permanent residence in the Hudson River, the next morning, off the deck of a ferryboat, and that is where they went, in due time.

The next day's papers carried a brief notice of what had happened in the surgery. A Dr. Bruso, it appeared, had poisoned himself. The post-mortem was conclusive upon that point. The dingy servant had discovered the body about 6 p. m.

There was no mention of any ancient, broken fragments of bone on the floor. Probably the housemaid had swept up that litter as a matter of course. She seemed an unimaginative person, that housemaid.

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9. *The Head*

The head most strangely seemed like one I knew;
  It rolled, and spun, and stopped in front of me,
  And then lay grinning up so cheerfully,
I wondered what it wanted me to do.
I did not like its awful, deathly hue,
  Nor yet the ligaments that seemed to be
  Bloodless, nor those white eyes that still could see,
Nor that wide mouth whence blood came dripping through.

And now I think I surely must have dreamed;
  Such hideous things in life are rarely found;
    They savor of the nethermost black pit.
For all at once, in agony I screamed—
  The head leaped upward in one frightful bound,
    And, dropping straight in front of me, it split.

The TINKLE of the CAMEL'S BELL

by FRANK·OWEN

"Her eyes glistened like black opals in the mellow orange light."

LI KAN was a very rich man, yet he kept a small hotel in Hankow and had the simplest of tastes. Nothing aroused his anger. Nothing aroused his enthusiasm. He viewed life in a very impersonal manner. It interested him. All sorts and conditions of people came to his house, poor and rich alike, wanderers who anchored like ships for a moment at his wharf and then drifted on.

Whence did they come? Whither were they going? These were the questions Li Kan liked to ponder as he smoked a long bamboo pipe of vile tobacco. For hours he would sit in a corner of his tea room engrossed in his own meditations. He seemed to live in a perpetual dream.

One night as he slept he heard the tinkle of a camel's bell, a camel that was doubtless part of a caravan headed for the North, a caravan trading in adventure.

"Why should I not journey abroad?" he mused. "I am rich. Perhaps I would have adventures as boundless as the sea."

The tinkle of the camel's bell continued. It was a lure beckoning him onward into unknown lands. Throughout the night he lay sleepless, his brain bursting with plans and ambitions. He would set out on a mission of drollery, to see life, to be amused, and if possible, to bestow a bit of philosophy upon those who chanced to come within the radius of his charm.

He left his hotel on a certain day when the air was fragrant with the aroma of spices, a day when caravans were passing laden with silks and perfumes and fine porcelains. It seemed to him to forebode a mysteriously pleasant journey. All that he carried with him was bound up in a small rug. About his person was disposed a generous sum of money. But the costume he wore was the costume of a poor man. It was of blue silk, but faded and slightly frayed with age.

Li Kan breathed deeply of the air in which ten thousand eery odors blended.

The first night of his pilgrimage found him far off in the mountain fastnesses where habitations were few. He had not provided himself with charts or maps because he imagined such a procedure would sap much of the glamor from his enterprise. Thus it was that the night shadows creeping down like serpents from the bleak mountains found him rather at a loss for a roof. Night at best is a dismal thing, suggesting sleep, which is a period of insensibility wherein a man's soul escapes to realms the location of which no human writer has ever been able to explain.

And it so happened that in his dilemma Li Kan chanced upon a filthy hostelry that was so vile it was nauseous. Li Kan was one of the few Chinamen who appreciated the gift of cleanliness. Nevertheless, he preferred the hovel to the wind-swept mountain passes.

The keeper of the inn was Ts Ah-nyi, once a famous outlaw who had quit the main roads of travel because there was a price upon his head sufficiently large to make his death a thing to be desired. He was a short, squat, expressionless yellow-man, greasy and unkempt, who exhaled a loathsome odor that was stifling. He eyed Li Kan shrewdly, suspiciously, but he did not deny him a place wherein to sleep.

Until late into the night the two sat together drinking samshu and talking garrulously. After awhile Ts Ah-nyi commenced to grow intoxicated, not excessively so but sufficiently for him to become confidential. From a concealed pocket in his sleeve he drew a huge opal. It shimmered and gleamed in the feeble lantern-light like a tiny ball of fire.

"Have you ever seen anything like it?" he demanded in a guttural voice.

Li Kan yawned. From his own pocket he drew a mighty emerald. It was as green as field-grass in midsummer.

"Naught but this," he replied. "In all the world no other such emerald exists. It makes a pauper of me, so great is its power, because I am afraid to appear affluent else I might be robbed of it. I remain in poverty to protect this perfect jewel."

At sunrise Li Kan continued onward down the road, of the length of which he had no knowledge. To where it led, or for what purpose were enigmas. Toward noon he stopped by the wayside to eat a few nuts and to nibble a bit of cold turnip. And as he rested he reached into his pocket for the emerald. It was gone. He yawned slightly. After all, perhaps it was as well that his tale of its marvelous worth had been a fabrication. By lantern-light the green glass certainly resembled a fine jewel. Again he yawned. From the rug in which his rarest treasures were hidden he drew an opal, the gorgeous opal which Ts Ah-nyi had gloated over. In this vast world of deceit and treachery that at least was true, was real. In the sunlight it flashed more dazzlingly than by dim lantern-light.

Li Kan rose to his feet. As he pushed onward he mused, "I wonder if one can be called a robber simply because one robs a robber."

He finished eating his almonds and the cold turnip. The almonds were very good, the turnip was very good, life was very good.

MANY and interesting were the adventures which Li Kan experienced during the next few weeks. Drolleries galore passed before his comprehension. He laughed much, though there were times when he was greatly saddened by the poverty of the dwellers in the bleak, desolate country through which he was passing. Only a universalist can have any perspective, can appreciate his own comparative lack of importance as compared with the immensity of existing things.

One day on the fringe of a strange city he chanced upon an open gate leading to a great garden. There was no one about. The place seemed deserted. He realized that he was trespassing, but he ventured in. The white walks were deserted. In among the oaks and willows he wandered, past gorgeous flower-beds of wisteria and peonies. The scent of peach-blossoms was in the air. But there was no one about. The garden was beautifully cultivated but deserted.

As he walked deeper into the garden he approached a long, low, rambling house with a red roof. At the corners were fantastic designs and carved figures. The entrance-door was open. He stood before it, not knowing how to proceed. But the strange house beckoned, so he entered. What a profusion of beauty and charm greeted his eyes! The sudden change from bright sunshine to the soft-lighted rooms dimmed his vision for a moment, but as it cleared he gasped at the wondrous tapestries, the silken hangings, the gorgeous rugs of velvet softness, the marvelously carved vases and urns. Never, he thought, had such a display of splendor been spread out before him. On the air floated a suggestion of musk and old roses, perfume of magic that struck him like a drug until his senses reeled. Through room after room he passed, each more beauteous than the last, all hung in riotous colors reflecting from the silk draperies. But nowhere was there a sound. Not a footfall disturbed the tranquillity. Still here and there were lanterns burning, so the place could not have been long deserted.

At last he came to a room larger than all others. It was of immense length and completely draped in what appeared to be soft, dark carpet and a throneline structure at the far end. Above it hung a cluster of soft-toned orange lanterns. Upon the throne a lovely woman was seated. She, too, was dressed all in black, black that blended into the draperies until it appeared as though she had no body, just a white face and hands heavily bejeweled.

Li Kan gasped as he gazed upon her. She seemed very young and yet there was a suggestion of age about her. Her pungent lips were as fragrant as honey. Her eyes were somber, dreamful and dark as the velvet draperies. They glistened like black opals in the mellow orange light. Her hair was smooth and clung close to her cheeks. Even with the severity of its arrangement she was marvelously beautiful. Behind one ear she wore a small orange chrysanthemum.

At Li Kan's approach she rose to her feet.

"Welcome," she said in a voice that was like hushed music. "It is lonely in this great house and I am indeed gratified when chance passers-by are able to tarry here awhile. Life is a great wide road. To attain complete harmony and peace one should pause at intervals by the wayside. Come, talk with me. I have almost lost the power of speech, so long it is since I have been honored by conversing with a stranger."

As she spoke she led the way into one of the other rooms, a room far less severe than that room of clinging blackness. Here were charm and beauty. The hanging draperies were tapestries depicting flower gardens and children romping about in front of colorful temples. There were numerous teakwood chairs inlaid with ebony and mother-of-pearl disposed about the room in charming negligence. Tables bearing lighted lamps, lamps of blended restful intensity, added to the attraction. On the air floated an exotic perfume that made Li Kan drowsy as he inhaled it.

In the lighted room he had opportunity to survey more fully his companion. She was tall and slender. She glided about with snakelike ease, softly, serenely, soundlessly. The severity of her black costume was startling. It emphasized the ivory whiteness of her face and the vivid red splash of her lips. Li Kan selected a chair beside a table.

She waved a listless hand. "Drink," said she, "and forget."

On the table beside him was a jug and several cups. He poured the gay amber liquor into the vessels. It looked like liquid gold. Then proffering one to her he raised the other to his lips. The taste of that liquid was peculiar to an extreme. It caused his entire body to glow. It fired his blood. It made him forget. The past faded off into fog. Again he drank and nothing remained in his memory but the grace and charm of his lovely hostess. She sat opposite him singing softly to herself. The songs she sang were softly plaintive. For some unaccountable reason Li Kan shuddered. He was supremely contented. His will had been subjected to hers. She swayed him utterly. Poor Li Kan! At one sweep his soul had been captured by the Unknown.

"Drink," she whispered softly, pausing in her singing.

Li Kan drank as directed. It was pleasant to permit her to think for him.

Never in his life, he mused, had he beheld a woman so superbly beautiful as this strange singer who sat so calmly before him. Her white face fairly glowed. Her beauty was dazzling. Suddenly an intense desire overcame him to bestow some treasure upon her. At once he bethought himself of the wondrous opal which he had stolen from Ts Ah-nyi. He fumbled about in his garments until he located it. It gleamed like a bit of glowing metal as he held it out to her. She ejaculated a strange little cry as she put out her hand to seize it. It glowed gloriously until her hand closed upon it. Then instantly an odd change came over it. It ceased to glitter. The fire went out. It grew cold. She shuddered as she released it from her grasp. It fell to the floor, a cold, dead thing. Li Kan gazed at it fascinated. What had happened to this perfect stone? What was there in the touch of this lovely woman that deadened the fire in the opal?

Meanwhile the woman seemed slightly ill at ease. For the first time her wondrous poise forsook her. She seemed agitated, although at the same time she seemed more beautiful than ever. She walked nervously to where a vase of chrysanthemums stood upon a table. They were gorgeous yellow in the pungent light. Softly she drew one from the vase and pressed it to her lips. It withered at once and fell to the floor like a flower that had been parched and burned by the sun. Li Kan turned his head. He pretended that he had not witnessed the strange sight. The woman returned to her seat beside the table. She sighed softly but she did not sing again.

That night Li Kan slept in a lavish chamber at the far end of the house. There were cushions and

coverlets in profusion to comfort his rest. But he could not sleep. Fear gripped his heart. It made of him a pitiful thing, a shaking, cringing, fawning thing that jumped at every shadow.

After he turned out the lamps, which had added a bit of cheer to the room, it was as though reality vanished utterly. He was in a strange region of legends and odd beliefs. The blackness bore down upon him with frightful weight. It seemed to have texture like the black velvet draperies in the throneroom. And in the blackness he imagined he could dimly make out wraiths, forms, odd figments of his distorted imagination. Utter silence reigned. Its pitch was deafening, almost bursting his eardrums. It seemed as if numerous voices were whispering. Far in the distance they were forever whispering. Sighing and whispering. Moaning and whispering. Sobbing and whispering. The pressure of the blackness increased. He was suffocating, buried alive, engulfed in a jet pit of fear.

Yet naught had he beheld at the great house but beauty. The woman was more glorious than sunrise over the yellow sea, than moonlight on a pink coral beach, than fronds of palm trees, silhouetted against a deep blue starlit sky. The furnishings of the house were of immense worth. The tapestries were masterpieces. The vases were as wondrous as any ever turned out by the greatest ceramic artists of King-teh-chen. The floor coverings were as soft and rich as fine grass. Nothing had been singular except that the light of the opal had died when the lady had touched it. And a flower had withered that she had lifted to her soft red lips. Truly this was little whereof to weave such stark horror. Yet horror had taken root in his mind. He could not banish it. It was as unescapable as the pressing blackness that bore down upon his chest.

With great effort he rose from his couch and strode over to the tiny aperture that served as a window. It was no wider than the palm of his hand. Not even a dog could have pressed his way through it. He gazed beyond it eagerly. A bit of the moon was visible, and one bright star. Constantly they disappeared as scurrying clouds drifted by. Then the clouds thickened and the star vanished utterly, leaving the darkness more pronounced than ever.

In a frenzy of fear Li Kan relighted the lamps.

The room once more assumed an air of naturalness. The varicolored silk cushions, the rich coverlets, the carved teakwood pedestals on which rare porcelains stood, all served to draw him back to a state of repose. But the horror of his thoughts continued, the presentiment of impending calamity. For the rest of the night he slept not nor did he permit the lamps to expire.

The ensuing days passed like a weird fantasmagoria. Li Kan wished to leave that gorgeous house but he could not. Whenever he attempted to steal out into the sunlit garden he found the doors barred. It is a peculiar fact that he never told the lovely lady of his desire to leave. He believed that to do so would have been futile; more, it would have been highly dangerous. There was a menace constantly hanging over him. He felt it in every fiber of his body. It was as though a keen two-edged sword hung suspended above him by a thread. The trembling of a flower might cause it to fall.

As time wore on there were moments when he was madly in love with the beauteous lady. These were the periods when he had drunk much of the amber liquor and his blood was a surging fire. The liquor created a tumult within him. He longed to take her into his arms, to press his lips to hers, to take the present and let the future go. Then

remembrance of the opal that had lost its fire and the chrysanthemum that had been withered by the touch of her lips assailed him. What would happen to him if he took her into his arms? He was careful in all their moments together never to even touch her hand. He avoided her as though she had been a cauldron of molten metal.

He was permitted to wander practically at will throughout the house, though once as he entered the library there happened that which reawakened all his fears. The room was of enormous size and there were thousands upon thousands of volumes upon the shelves. He browsed around, examining a volume here and there as whim directed. The volumes were all musty and worn as though they had weathered the vicissitudes of ages. Li Kan was a connoisseur where fine books were concerned, and he became so deeply absorbed in the choice volumes that he forgot momentarily that he was virtually a prisoner in this peculiar house, a house in which he never saw a soul but the strange woman and yet where every bit of work was done as though it were cared for by a dozen servants. The meals were always laid in one of the rooms when they entered. All the viands and dishes were ready on the table. When the repast was over they left the room. It was as though spirits of some forgotten world were servants in that house. Once in the night as he slept Li Kan had distinctly felt cold, bony fingers on his forehead. He shrieked wildly and sprang from his couch. When the lamps were lighted there was no one in the room. But it could not have been imagination, for there were other nights when he felt the bony fingers, and on one particular occasion they fastened upon his throat like talons and dragged him to the floor. He had fought like a fury, choking, gasping. Cold perspiration cloyed his brow. His temples were bursting, his eyeballs bulging from their sockets. In the end he succeeded in beating off the fingers that were striving so indefatigably to destroy him. So far his own will was stronger than that of the mind beyond those bony fingers. What would happen when weakness overcame him, he dreaded to think.

But now all these things were forgotten as Li Kan passed his hands reverently over the volumes. Presently he drew from its place one that was yellow with age. The dust was thick upon it. He turned to the title page and read:

Some Account of the Sweet Lady Chin Chu
Who bartered her Soul for Immortality.
She gave her Life to escape Death.
Eons and Eons shall she live
Though without possessing any Life of her own.
All Life shall be drawn from everything she touches.
But of her own Life there shall be none.
She shall live endlessly until some Mortal
Discovers her Secret.

Li Kan was interrupted in his musings by a frightful shriek. The room was plunged into utter darkness. The shrieks continued. The intensity was frightful. Li Kan could feel bony fingers crawling over his face. His own hands shot up spasmodically, caught the crawling fingers and held. Then mercilessly, pitilessly he bent them back, bent them back until the cold, bare bones cracked. The shrieks were diabolical but his ears were deadened. Then came a flash, a flash as vivid as though the very sun had burst. The thread that held the two-edged sword snapped. It fell down upon him, carrying him down, down, down into an endless pit of unconsciousness.

When he again opened his eyes he was lying, a crushed figure, by the side of the road, the road upon which he had been journeying when he turned off to enter the gar-

den. He looked about him. There was no sign of house, of garden, of habitation anywhere in sight. What had happened? He neither knew nor cared. His body felt as though it had been crushed, broken. His pain was great but he heeded it not. He was free once more, back upon the road, back into the sunlight, back into the clear, crisp air of the mountains. Far in the distance he could hear the tinkle of a camel's bell. It was the bell of the leader of a camel train winding slowly back toward Hankow. It was going home. In that moment a great longing for his little hotel took root in the mind of Li Kan. Henceforth his traveling would be done in his own tea room. He would travel by listening to the adventures of other people.

He rose to his feet. His bones ached but he was able to walk. He shuddered as he thought what might have become of him if he had kissed the soft red lips of Chin Chu. It was a foolish thought, but he almost regretted that he had not risked all for that one sublime moment of rhapsody.

During the ensuing years Li Kan sat in his hotel. Over and over again he told and retold of his adventures. Many believed and went on their way marveling. Others scoffed. They could not understand what had happened to the magnificent house, the lovely lady and the garden. Many shook their heads. They refused to believe. They credited the strange story to the vapors of samshu or opium. But Li Kan smiled. He was a philosopher. After all, a story was a story. He did not bother showing them the opal of Ts Ah-nyi which he still possessed, the opal which had glistened and glowed with a wondrous fire but which was now dead, as dead and cold as the bones of old prophets.

"A man may lie," mused Li Kan, "but a rare jewel never does." And he drew loudly and long at his old bamboo pipe of vile tobacco.

EASTER ISLAND

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

How many weary centuries have flown
  Since strange-eyed beings walked this ancient shore,
  Hearing, as we, the green Pacific's roar,
Hewing fantastic gods from sullen stone!
The sands are bare; the idols stand alone.
  Impotent 'gainst the years was all their lore:
  They are forgot in ages dim and hoar;
Yet still, as then, the long tide-surges drone.

What dreams had they, that shaped these uncouth things?
Before these gods what victims bled and died?
What purple galleys swept along the strand
That bore the tribute of what dim sea-kings?
But now they reign o'er a forgotten land,
Gazing forever out beyond the tide.

"The dead man seemed to speak in coughing, liquid grunts."

The Story Thus Far

IVGA BRENRYK, the daughter of Wladislaw Brenryk of Ponkert, who had been put to death as a werewolf, is suspected of being a witch. The villagers of Ponkert are roused to fury by finding a woodchopper dead in the forest, frightfully mangled by wolves, and Ivga, as the werewolf's daughter, is held to be the cause of his death. She is taken from her foster-father, Dmitri with the paralyzed legs, and tied to a post on the gallows in the village square, subjected to the torments of the villagers. She is to be burned at the stake on the morrow. Meanwhile Hugo Gunnar, a young Frenchman who is in love with her, returns to the village with horses to carry himself and Ivga and her foster-father to France. Learning what has happened to the girl, he rescues her at dead of night, killing the sentry, and flees with her up the mountain as the village awakes in uproar and starts pursuit. Meantime Dmitri, having recovered the use of his legs, approaches the village to rescue Ivga, carrying his great two-handed sword, Gate-Opener.

10. Dmitri Holds the Narrow Way

BEHIND them, a man bearing a mighty sword had just reached the corpse of the spy Hugo had silenced. At his back skulked a double shadow—his own and a second beside it, yet only one man was visible in the moonlight!

The man bent over the body, nodded admiringly as he saw the hole, skilfully placed beneath the third rib, and passed on upon weak and tottering limbs, chuckling to himself. It had been a neat death and he recognized that the cause of

it had been the same weapon that laid low the sentry by the scaffold.

Also he had more than a suspicion that he knew *who* bore the weapon, whose like had never been seen before in Ponkert, and *who* had cut the bonds of that prisoner the sentry guarded.

He hobbled around the corner of the building. A long way off he saw two people running across the fields toward the mountain.

He shouted, but they were too far away to hear. Using Gate-Opener as a crutch, he followed.

Beside him, if he had turned his head, he might have seen two shadows slip over the ground.

Back in the village, lights were beginning to show in houses and torches to wave in the streets as the crowd gathered about the scaffold in the square, all confusion and shouting, scurrying madly about in search of the fugitives, each one looking carefully where he thought he would be least likely to find the werewolf. There was much crowding together.

"Safety in numbers!" "The Werewolf's daughter is loose!" "They went that way!" And off they would pour in another direction, howling like madmen.

There was soon a great deal of deserting from the ranks, as the most lukewarm and half-hearted members decided that the night was too chill for delicate lungs and it would be as well to wait until morning.

Thus it was twenty minutes before the body of the watchman was discovered sprawling in a dark alley, and the two who fled had climbed the mountain.

Dmitri had just reached its base when lights began to wink and flare across the fields—lights that were not needed for illumination on the moonlight-bathed paths, but which were brought because it was well known that a werewolf feared artificial light.

Now the road over the mountain is not a fair, level causeway, but a steep declivity, crusted with loose rock and round pebbles, until one reaches the very top, where the summit is notched, grooved, pinnacles on either hand, forty feet or more of black rock clothed in summer by dainty flowers that no hand will ever pluck or nostrils smell.

At the bottom of this tremendous groove, two figures lay panting after the tedious struggle up the shifting slope. Stones still clattered down, knocking dryly together in rush and chattering hurry, the excited babble of their going droning up to the two in a murmur of sound, and though the rolling pebbles gathered others with them, becoming a tiny landslide as they poured into the valley, the roar of their final plunge came up to the twin peaks as a faint and airy whisper. So remote were they, in their awful majesty, from the passions of men.

The boy and girl rested. They had climbed the slope and had arrived at steps cut in the solid rock, carved by hands that were long since dust to make a watch-tower for the castle that lay ruined far away, its owners dead and its past forgotten.

Up the steps and along a dangerous path hanging over a straight drop of a hundred feet they had passed, and up other steps at its end, around a boulder and then a steep climb over the lip of the cliff directly above the giddy drop, where one false step meant death.

"I can see now why this is a short cut," panted the boy. "This place was made for goats and children. No one else would be fool enough to come here!"

A roguish quirk twitched the girl's cheek.

"So you think I am a child, do you? I am seventeen, if your mightiness cares to know."

"Very old indeed, Grandma!"

grinned the boy; "but I didn't mean *you* were a child."

"O-oh, a goat then!" she gasped, apparently horrified. "I am going back. I didn't climb way up here to be called a goat. Go away, I hate you!" And she indignantly turned her back to him.

He laid his hands upon her shoulders. "Ivga, look at me. Don't be silly. Why do you tease me so when I love you so much?"

"Go away from me," she snapped. "What do you care about goats?"

"Some of them are useful when they are trained right. They can carry loads, or pull little carts or——"

"Will you be quiet? I don't like you any more!" She stamped her little foot and twisted free, scornfully eyeing him. A bewitching mock fury, with her thick hair streaming out in the wind and the wild moon glint in her eyes.

"——Or make cunning pets when they are tamed," he went on as though no interruption had occurred, "but when they are stubborn they should really be beaten!"

"Beaten! Let me see you try it!" she began, but a sudden noise from far below, a tinkling of stones set in motion, cut her tirade short.

Her pretended anger disappeared in an instant and she changed from a seeming virago to a very frightened little girl crying, "Oh! they have found us! They are coming to kill me! Save me, Hugo! I love you!"

Then, all cuddles and kisses and quick hugs, fierceness vanished, trust and confidence in his strength to protect now in its place, until the world spun around him and he was dizzy with surprize at such a sudden change.

He tore himself free from her embrace and sprang to the edge of the cliff. Far beneath, a black, indistinct figure moved up the treacherous gravel slope, an object which climbed slowly and stopped often as though the road was hard, yet steadily progressed higher and nearer while he watched.

A long way back, the fields gleamed and twinkled with many flecks of dancing light which drifted toward the mountain like fireflies in interweaving love-dance over a marsh. Farther to the rear, Ponkert was ablaze with lights, and Hugo heard a thin, faded murmur like distant rapids far off, where in mad hubbub and howling rout the people surged about an immense bonfire in the square.

Hugo swore softly to himself and moved back upon the cliff. With both hands, he was struggling with a loose rock to roll down upon the climber, when the girl, who had also looked over the edge, prevented his design.

"Quick," she whispered fearfully, "let us go to the boat. He is still far away, and when he reaches here we will be gone and he will not know where we went."

Her logic was indisputable, as she went on, saying that a falling stone would betray their presence upon the mountain even if this man were killed, for he would be discovered by the others; and then if they were not away by the time the pursuers came up, a bombardment of stones that might sink their little boat would surely follow.

So, against his desire, he reluctantly allowed himself to be drawn along the cleft in the mountain without another downward glance. Had either looked again, they could hardly have failed by this time to recognize the massive sword which swung sometimes when the climber staggered on the dangerous path. Along its five-foot length it flamed in the moonlight like the demon-forged sword of Ibn Asad Iraf, which the genii formed of the white ash of thunderbolts.

He had passed the gravel slide and was half-way up the mountain, when

Hugo and the girl commenced the descent of the other side. Here it was less precipitous, but more dangerous than the upward climb, for the moon did not light this side, and here, too, the path was narrow and steep.

Down slippery steps they stumbled; along crumbling rotten ledges drowned in shadow, crashing through bushes and feeling their way about in the dark, they tottered precariously on the edge of destruction.

And from below it seemed that the river slowly came up to meet them, and the girl could see the little boat rocking by its secret wharf, hidden in the reeds. The dampness and chill of the river fog was rising about them when the mob commenced to climb the gravel slide.

High above them on the path below the cliff rim, Dmitri leaned on Gate-Opener and rested.

The struggle had been hard and long for his feeble limbs, and only the deathly fear of being too late to help his loved one had kept him moving. Burdened by the heavy sword, it seemed a miracle to him that the climb had been accomplished. But the worst was over; only a few steps separated him now from the girl he worshiped; and knowing that once upon the mountain, the three could hold off an army, he rejoiced.

And the torches below mounted higher, relentlessly nearer, the shouts of their bearers now quite clear.

Wearily he walked toward the steps that led up to the cleft above, almost overbalanced by the great broadsword.

"Ivga!" he called, when he topped the cliff's edge, and then as no answer came, again he cried loudly, forgetting caution, "Hugo! Where are you? It is Dmitri!"

Still no sound but the whistle of the wind through the mountain-top ravine and the dry whisper of pebbles a-rattle far below upon the slope, set in motion by many feet.

Then, gripping his heart with a chill of foreboding, came the memory of the boat upon the river, and he began to run along the bottom of the little gorge. Perhaps he was too late!

And looking over the edge of the opposite cliff, he saw them, half lost in the fog that streamed about them and nearly to the river.

So it came about, that knowing he could not reach them in time to save himself, and realizing that if they knew he was left alone behind them, they would return to rescue or die with him, he forbore to speak and watched silently while they dropped lower into the fog, save when once he whispered with lips that trembled, "Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye."

For a long time he lay watching them as they clambered down the cliff, until his eyes blurred so that he could see them no longer. Angrily he dashed away the tears, denying even to himself that he was sad.

"I am not sad!" he cried to the stars. "I am happy, Brenryk, happy! Can you hear? Wherever they may go, whatever they may do, it will be I that has made it possible. I promised you, oh tragic soul, that I would guard her with my life. Watch me if you can, and see how a Helgar keeps an oath. With my blood I buy her happiness. And she *will* be happy because of me and *I* will be happy because she will never know I died to save her! Oh, Brenryk, I am glad, *glad* that I am here tonight! Not everyone can die for the one he loves best in all the world!"

Trailing the immense sword behind him, he ran back, and in the center of the pass chose his position with care, selecting a spot where the two sides of the notch came closest like the narrow point of the letter M. And of the M, each angle was a

pinnacle of rock, forty feet in height.

There was only one spectator. The shadow that had accompanied Dmitri thus far now disengaged itself from *his* shadow and rose like a wisp of fog along the cliff until it reached the top of the left-hand pinnacle, where it stopped and became one with the other shadows on the wall. But two spots of light glistened where it had paused, like moonlight reflected from moist, shiny eyeballs.

Below, in the bottom of the ravine, Dmitri made ready. The floor was not level except in the spot where he stood, but sloped in a gentle descent in the direction of the river and more steeply toward the other cliff. It was strewn with rocks that had fallen from the twin pinnacles.

These Dmitri cleared from his platform, casting them in the path up which his attackers would soon climb. He could hear them toiling up the loose gravel as he dislodged the last movable stone and rolled it down. The cursing and the rattling of stones were very near.

A lurid, smoky glare rose over the edge of the cliff. A heavy thump, followed by a chorus of jeers and coarse laughter. He ran back to the center of the pass and waited in a niche in the wall.

The murky smoke and glare of the torches shining on the rock were like the sun rising over the lip of the ledge. Then three bright flames burst into sight together and the old man crouched closer in his niche, where the light would not find him, whispering to his sword, "Soon! Soon! Dost thou hunger? Patience, but a little longer!"

While he patted Gate-Opener's hilt and crooned to it, the people were gathering on the ledge.

Up they came, breathing hard and sweating from the climb, looking about with curiosity. Although the mountain was so near home, many had never climbed it since they were children, and the surroundings were strange.

Well content to rest, those foremost waited until all had come, before essaying the next climb. When the troop were gathered, Dmitri saw that they numbered perhaps a rough two-score persons, and he chuckled to himself, stroking the smooth blade.

"Only forty, Gate-Opener, *only* forty! How many will there be after they have played with thee, sweet chum?"

The mass began to move. One hundred feet away, seventy feet, forty-five. . . . Dmitri cast one last look around him, saw that only three could approach him at once, by reason of the narrow passage, took a deep breath—thirty feet now—and sprang into the open, his back against a large boulder immovably imbedded in the rock.

None saw his leap. One second he was not, the next—there he stood leaning on the great sword, square in the center of the path as though he had sprung from the living rock. Then, with the design of halting the mob, creating a panic or delay, he opened his lips and from them pealed forth a strident inhuman screech, sounding like nothing else in either Heaven or Earth. It was the guttural Hi-yi-yi of the Cossack about to join in battle!

Cries of fear arose from the crowd as they saw the apparition and stopped, while above them upon his pinnacle the Master chuckled and settled himself for the show.

The curtain had risen, the players were at hand, the first line had been spoken—the play was about to begin!

The Master promised himself a rare entertainment. He had tested the mettle of Ponkert men before and was well assured that they would not pass until the boy and girl were far down the river. So he hoped, for the girl's escape meant much to him.

The report that the maniac's kick had been fatal to Dmitri had been circulated in the village and believed, for it was well known that the cripple had not left his chair for many days, but little known that the ailment was confined only to the old man's legs. So now they looked at this specter arisen from the dead, and the superstitious mob surged back in horror. Faces blanched while pale lips muttered half-forgotten charms for the laying of the restless dead who will not sleep o' nights, and twitching fingers crossed hearts with hurried strokes.

And Dmitri moved! The thirsty sword swept through thinly complaining air in dazzling circular swoop.

"Come!" he howled as he swung the sword, the red glare of the torches running along the blade like dripping blood. "Come and kiss Death, dog-brothers!"

And a man moved—the idiot tanner, spurred forward by hate. More brave than the others, he came forward on trembling limbs, with outstretched hand and ingratiating smile. Deceitful and placatory words waited to be uttered in case the *thing* was a phantom, and behind his back the other hand closed upon the heavy dagger, to be used if it was only a man that blocked the way.

Dmitri leaned upon his sword and waited.

Nearer the tanner came to the specter and nearer still, while his hoarse, frightened breathing was all that could be heard—that and oars a-thump upon the river.

Fingers seeking, touched and found solid flesh beneath material cloth, and with a cry, "He lives!" the madman darted out his dagger in swift and cowardly thrust.

Slashing down as the falcon stoops for prey screamed the thirsty sword, shore through the profaning arm—and the hand, still clasped about the dagger's hilt, spun into the shadows. Then with quick reverse stroke, the old man struck yet again, so that ten feet of air was the only union between the tanner's head and the shoulders that had borne it.

While the body stood upon limply crumpling legs, the imprisoned air within its lungs rushing forth through dribbling neck, so that the dead man seemed to speak in coughing liquid grunts, the head rolled, jaw agape in stupid amaze, and stood upon its stub, as though it watched the battle through fast-glazing eyes.

For, as the wheezing body collapsed in a red, sticky pool, with a roar, "He lives!" that was flung back by the gloomy echoes in the ravine, the crowd surged on, axes and knives waving high among the wild and frantic torches.

In the meantime, events were taking place upon the river. The boat was fast to the wharf, and the river had fallen so low that when the two entered the boat, the shallow water would not bear it over the muddy bottom.

Hugo was forced to jump overside and push mightily through the reeds, sinking deep in the mud. After some moments of agonized struggle he felt harder ground beneath his feet. The keel of the boat grated on gravel and floated free, then swung sluggishly in the still water near the shore while he climbed in and took the oars.

A confused murmur of voices drifted down from the heights, and the girl turned to listen.

"They have reached the top, Hugo!" she exclaimed. "Hurry!"

The oars dug deep and the boat shot forward with the sudden pounce of a cat. The thole-pins creaked and the stout oars bent with the stroke, Hugo clinging to the shore beneath the overhanging cliff in dread of falling stones which he knew would follow if they were seen.

The skin along his spine crawled and his scalp prickled with the momentary anticipation of the shouts that would mean they were discovered, and the rumble of falling boulders that would follow the shouts. Even the splash of one dropping from that height would be sufficient to fill the boat in an instant and sink it, leaving them helpless in the water and exposed to their pursuers.

Ivga, mercifully ignorant of their peril, was listening for further sounds.

Five more strokes would take them now to safety; three had been taken when suddenly a wild, unearthly screech pealed out from above. The boat was exactly below the notch in the mountain-top.

It was Dmitri's wordless yell as he stepped from his concealment to face the mob. Something in the tone struck home to Ivga, but believing Dmitri dead, she did not associate the voice with his. Still it was familiar, and her puzzled brows knit together in vague, indefinable worry. It seemed to her as though she should know who or what had screamed.

Strange was the voice, and yet somehow—not strange!

She put up her hand to attract Hugo's attention. "Stop!" she commanded in a low voice. "Did you hear that noise? What can it be?"

Now, although Hugo had heard the screech and recognized it for what it was, the voice of a man, he read into it a dreadful meaning and suspected that they were seen. So nothing was farther from his mind than any thought of hesitating there in that dangerous spot. Yet not wishing the girl to be alarmed, he answered carelessly, " 'Twas nothing. A night bird crying," and with another fierce stroke shot into midstream, and the rushing current caught them and swept the two away.

Still was Ivga vaguely disturbed, but though she listened long, ready to trap any vagrant sound, none came, and as they were carried farther and farther away from the mountain and the lights of Ponkert, the more remote became any possibility of hearing the uproar soon to take place in the notch.

At last she sank down into the bottom of the boat and there lay, while Hugo rowed sturdily down the stream, and seeing him apparently forgetful of her presence there, gazing off into the dark forests, she placed her head in the hollow of her arm and tried to sleep.

Dmitri's back was firm against the boulder and his left side was partly protected by an outcrop of rock as the man-pack closed in upon him. Thus, he was not entirely exposed to the villagers' weapons, which began to lick in and out like frozen tongues of flame.

Those who had swords, feeling their superiority over the common herd who were armed by more menial weapons, had taken the front of battle.

Dung-forks were present; flails, clubs and pikes, spears and staves of wood waved in the torch smoke like limbs of a leafless forest. The humble spade was conspicuous; ax and hatchet glittered; and knives reached out like an old witch's one lone fang.

It was a motley crew, and motley was the arming of it. But at the fore, swords were slithering and blades hissed as though in the darkness Death sat, whetting his scythe.

And the harvest was not long in the reaping, for the time that Dmitri had spent polishing his well-beloved Gate-Opener, over and over until it attained an unbelievable edge, had not been wasted, and a heap of bodies, like a windrow in the haying-field, began to rise, a bloody barrier across the narrow way.

And the blades kissed. Rusty weapons that had hung long disused

upon the walls of some peasant's hut, heavy ancient tools for murder, wielded by unskilful hands; they circled in clumsy stroke and parry, stroke again—and parry, third stroke, *no* parry—and so fell; clean, unblooded, unfleshed, racing their owners to the ground, and other blades hacked in turn.

And now the path grew slippery, a tiny rivulet trickling black in the torchlight, from gaping throat, from riven chest, from shattered skull, while panting reckless men struggled up the steep.

Slipping in the red ooze, sliding and falling on the loose rocks, stumbling over bodies of those that had gone before, on they came, drunk with the reek of blood—and staggered back, wailing for a space through bubbling throats, striving for one more glimpse through eyes that were slit and never would see again, or feeling their way with stumps of arms through the eager throng.

Many remained to add their bodies to the rampart of steaming flesh, but a pitiful debris of battle crawled back, one-legged, *no*-legged, thudding with raw elephantine hoofs which had been knee-joints, upon the rock, every step a separate agony and shorter by over a foot in height than a moment before.

Dmitri's sword was sharp!

Several died not knowing the blow that slew them, slashed into eternity by a cold edge like a breath of wind upon their throats, and while their blades shone unsullied by any stain save rust, Gate-Opener, as it rose and fell, drank deep, bit hard and lusted for the next, swooping hither and thither in hungry search for prey.

And men began to cry out that it was no man that opposed them, but a devil, and that the sword lived!

So Dmitri held the narrow way.

A lull came in the fighting, while men moved the wounded from their path and Dmitri tugged the bodies of the dead into a heap before him.

They were clustering together for the rush, when a voice roared out in that place of Death as though a fiend was merry. It was a hideous, ghastly laugh! Again it howled out, and then wild and exultant:

> Shen, shen, shivagen.
> Swing the steel, swing again.
> Ride, ride to our play.
> Slay, slay!

and Dmitri made mock of his enemies in a song of the steppe.

Then they were at him again, three together, scrambling doggedly over the heap of bodies, one with a pike and two with clubs.

Gate-Opener swung up and the pike rattled in two pieces on the rock, while its holder impaled himself upon the sword. Swift disengagement, for, cursing, the others were upon him; a flurry of clubs, dull thuds, a sharp cry and one was reeling back, carrying his left arm, severed at the shoulder, in his right hand; stupidly, as one who sees the calamity which has befallen, yet can not believe. The other man lay prone, another body for the barricade.

Those that were left of the mob wavered and drew back, milling together, while they gathered courage for the charge, but Dmitri, although exhausted, allowed himself not a moment's rest. He was busy fixing the fallen swords and pikes in the barricade, so that the points projected outward, presenting a thorny hedge of steel points, behind which he waited.

The boat had traveled perhaps a half-mile, driven by Hugo's strong muscles and the current, when the girl who lay at his feet, her head pillowed on the great book made from her father's skin, looked up as the boy rowed vigorously down the stream.

She was leaving her home with a stranger, bound for a strange land, and though her life in the village had been a thing of horror, best forgotten, still it was home, the only one she had ever known.

Dmitri was dead, murdered in his cabin without being able to lift a finger toward his defense or hers; trapped like a rabbit in its burrow. All that she had held dear had died with him, the only father she had ever known. What was to become of her now?

Hugo's face looked hard in the moonlight, set and stern, lips compressing with each stroke of the oars. Carrying her away! Where? And to what fate? Perhaps his father, the lord, would not like a girl that brought nothing but the clothes she stood in. Perhaps Hugo would not love her long; man's fancy was fickle, so Dmitri had told her, and if he should leave her, what was there then to do, but die?

These and other thoughts flitted through her mind while she lay there intently staring at him, until at last he became conscious of her fearful gaze and looked down, smiling.

How his face changed when he smiled, little crinkles about the eyes appearing, that one would never suspect existed! Suddenly she was positive he loved her truly, woman's intuition proclaiming with certainty that Hugo could be trusted, but she longed to have him tell her so again.

"Art tired, sweetheart?" he asked, placing his hand on her forehead.

The gentle touch soothed her wild fancies and she nodded, eyes closed, and clasped his hand in both her own. The little hands were hot and fevered, but peace and rest began to flow into her from Hugo's cool, hard palm. He was so strong, so valiant, so adorable, although she would never tell him *that!*

The fingers gripped tighter, she felt the boat rock as he sat down beside her, and impulsively she laid her head upon his chest and his free arm held her close. Thus they drifted along silently, each happy because the other was near, until the girl was first to speak.

"Hugo," she whispered, "do you really love me?"

"You know I do," he answered.

"You must. I am so sick and so tired, Hugo. Always love me—I love you so much. I could not bear it if you should leave me now, for I have no one else but you. You must be my father, mother, sweetheart and brother, for you are all I have to love, and I should die if you loved someone else."

Presently she spoke again, her voice muffled against his chest. "How much do you love me, Hugo? Was there ever another girl in France?"

It was a hard question to answer. There is always another girl or another man, and who can measure love?

But Hugo rose nobly to the occasion, and if his speech was perhaps a little grandiloquent, it can be forgiven him, since he did not live in an age or clime where emotions are suppressed as tightly as the present.

To the age-old question followed as old an answer, and if there were half remembrances of black eyes and red lips in a warmer land, these memories were stifled forever as he said, "There was never anyone else but you, dear. Never! While grass grows and wind blows I'll love thee, sweet, and when they grow and blow above me, my heart will still be thine!"

UPON the mountain, a young man was pleading with the mob. It was the brother of the slain woodchopper they had found in the forest, and as he gesticulated and stamped about the end of the small ravine, a mad fanatical light shone in his eyes.

"Come!" he raved at them; "are ye men or sheep? We are forty and he is one! Even rats fight when they are in packs! Ye are worse than rats!"

There was a deathlike silence of some seconds, broken only by the groans of a faceless man dragging himself down the slope, trailing a shattered body along by his arms.

Then suddenly a voice spoke somewhere in the crowd, with a certain pleased surprize, like one who has just discovered a new and amusing fact. Two words! "*Were* forty!" was all that it said, dwelling with a peculiar unction on the first word of the correction.

"Who said that?" cried the first speaker, glaring angrily about, but no one answered.

The broken man lurched on, crawling like some eyeless slug toward the cliff edge and the people. They shrank away from him as though he were a leper.

An uncanny feeling was fast becoming a conviction, that any who had felt the bite of that long sword were accursed!

From the sides they shrank away and from in front, until he struggled through a lane of silent watchers and reached the edge of the cliff. He stopped, sensing vacancy before him, his shattered head swaying blindly to and fro. No one moved to save him. A hoarse puzzled croak bubbled from his red mask of a face; then he heaved forward on his arms, balanced on the edge, toppled and fell.

A shrill scream, a thud below, a roar of sliding gravel, and silence!

Men breathed again, the strain was broken; shamefacedly they dodged one another's eyes, each thinking, "Why didn't *I* stop him before he fell? Why *am* I such a coward?"

The young man seized the presented opportunity.

"*He* did that!" he shouted, pointing at Dmitri, a dim figure in the pass. "Now! Once more! The Werewolf cowers beyond him! Shall we wait longer?"

With deep growls of rage and shame they answered him, and the mass surged forward in the last charge. It was a ponderous, irresistible wave of bodies that rolled on to the attack, reached the barricade—and ghastly, horrible shrieks arose as those in the front were pinned upon the spikes that projected from it. But there was no turning back.

Over the bodies of their writhing comrades climbed the mob and pressed on, presenting a front of spears and pikes.

In vain Dmitri struck and struck again. The foe was too many, and feeling his strength ebbing fast, the old man knew his hour was upon him.

Back he was crowded, as they mounted over the still-living bodies that were spiked on the barrier of projecting swords and sprang down, hammering hard with splintered clubs and spears.

Suddenly as he fought he recollected the words of the old gipsy crone and with a wry smile realized that this was the scene she had described in her vision.

A red mass of gashes, he staggered back still farther, Gate-Opener swinging like a monstrous sickle in the hands of Death, no longer bright and shining, its edge nicked and dulled on the bones of men.

A momentary lull in the fighting. The way was clogged with dead, and as they cleared the path, Dmitri, howling an unintelligible battle yell, went berserk.

In *his* turn he charged—his last wild strokes a mad effort to keep them back from the river ten seconds more—for within his body something had broken and he knew the end was near.

Gate-Opener whistled down and a man collapsed like a slashed sack of meal—eviscerated, his life juices

flowing from him. Then while Dmitri still hacked his road through flesh, his right foot came upon something that rolled and threw him down.

Instantly he was up, but too late—three spears took him and he fell. With his last failing remnants of sight, he saw that he had stepped upon the tanner's head and that Gate-Opener lay close by, shattered beyond mending. Both were leaving together—the Man and the Sword.

He smiled wryly again. "A dead man shall slay thee!" he quoted the gipsy woman, and his eyes closed.

Over his body, cursing, pushing, the tiny remnants of the mob rushed on to the river, but too late, for the twain were far away.

And behind them, Dmitri raised himself upon an elbow, gasping faintly with his last breath, "Brenryk! Have I not kept my word to thee?" and so died.

Upon the river, a little boat raced south, rocking in the rushing current, and as they drifted far from earshot of the village, the boy began to sing, softly, crooningly, the remainder of the song he had sung in the forest and which was the elf man's plea to the fairy for her love:

I'll build for thee a silver palace
  And we will call it home,
Together drink from a golden chalice,
  Nevermore to roam.
Pain and sorrow all forgotten,
  Happy we will be;
Let mortals go their stupid way,
  For I love thee!

And as the voice, mellow and young, died away in the distance while they slipped toward the Danube and the sea, the captain's soul passed from his war-torn body, drove past the Master perched upon his rock and began the journey to the place where such souls go.

And the Master, as he sped upon his way, gave the captain that sign of approbation which is given from one valiant spirit to another; for had he not served the Master well?

But of the red wrath and ruin that raged in Ponkert that day, when the soldiers of the Black Brigade learned of the glorious fight and sought out those that were left from the battle, taking a hideous revenge for their beloved captain, it is not necessary to speak.

Carried along on the bosom of the river, the little boat went rocking downstream, while above the sky reddened with morning.

In the stern, Hugo trailed an oar as rudder, no longer rowing, more than half asleep; nodding over his task, but not so far gone that he did not know when the girl's little fingers slipped into his hand lying limp on the seat.

He opened one eye enough to see that hers were closed and that she slept. Apparently she was dreaming, for her lips were curved in the loveliest smile he had ever seen upon her face. She looked much like a little child, lying there asleep, her thick curls in pretty disarray.

Carefully, that he might not wake her, he disengaged her fingers from his hand, removed his coat and spread it over her. Then one calloused palm held the oar again and the other stroked a curl that lay conveniently near.

At the light touch, she smiled once more as though her dreams were pleasant.

Dimly, happily, she knew that she would never, never, be lonely any more.

11. Blois at Last

So we see them, two wanderers in Arcadia, almost hidden from us now by the intervening years, dropping down the river, each finding joy in the other, perfect mates and very happy.

But it would be too long a story to relate the whole of that journey—

how from this river they entered another whose name we do not know, but might have been the Drave, the Save or the Theiss, and were carried on; how they went ashore by night and procured food in many manners, sometimes a vegetable garden suffering from their visits, sometimes a hen-roost or dairy. For although Hugo had money it must be saved for ship passage when they reached the sea.

And they had far indeed to go, some seven or eight hundred miles of travel upon the Danube alone, full of natural perils, more dangerous than the men they encountered—and they were many.

A separate tale could be made of their adventures on the river—how they passed by cities in the night unhindered, by castles that frowned down at them, two midgets in a cockle-shell, but accosted them not for toll; how river pirates, less lenient, twice attacked them, sweeping out in long, low skiffs from the hidden coves in the river bank.

That fight at least deserves a chapter—how they howled out their cry of "Blood and death!" as the skiff came near and evil faces leered at the two in the boat; how the "knitting-needle" knitted well, unraveling soul from body; and how *another* fought beside the girl and boy, so that the attackers dotted the sullen water and the fishes fed for days. For, invisible to them, a *thing* brooded over the boat, a creature powerful to aid and protect, and unknowing they were owned by it, they unconsciously did its bidding. But to their enemies, it proved a horror by night and a terror by day, a thing that mazed men's brains so that sword strokes and spear thrusts missed their marks; a thing that occasionally was seen by the attackers in its true shape, so that mind could not bear the shock and men flung their weapons away and themselves overside, gibbering madmen if they lived!

For the Master was leaving Ponkert and Hungary for a new hunting-ground, and wo to any who would hinder his journey or harm those who traveled under his protection!

And amongst these perils, those of the river must be mentioned.

Once they passed the Kazan Defile and the terrible Iron Gates, the rest was less hazardous, but all that way was from one danger into another, and they dared not travel by land. So along the stream from Old Moldova to Orsova and the Iron Gates they floated, where the river is enclosed by mountains and rocky banks and even landing was difficult at that time.

Through the rocks, sand banks and whirlpools they went, sometimes wet all day long from the spray, and often sick and always weary, but pressing on, ever on, and each night one day's journey nearer the sea.

Once their boat was sunk in the terrible Stenka Rapids, a bank of rocks extending almost across the river, most of them visible at low water, such as they then had, and eleven hundred yards long. Below these they stole another boat that night and went on.

Through the vast swamp of the Danube delta they reached the coast of the Black Sea, from the Sulina mouth of the river. Here when the sea rose even a few inches, the banks of the river could be known only by clusters of wretched hovels built on piles, and narrow strips of sand. It was a wild, open seaboard, strewn with wrecks which were the only guide for mariners to find where the shallows were.

The people were half-starved, inbred, atavistic creatures, wreckers by nature, hardly human, and the two were afraid and did not linger.

Where now is a first-class port with a town of five thousand inhabitants, lighthouses and floating

elevators, it was only by chance that they obtained passage on a ship. At Constantinople they shipped again for the last time. Most of their money was gone and it was more for pity than for gain that a captain agreed to carry the wanderers to France.

And so, they reached the sea and ships, and from the sea they came at last to Blois.

Epilogue

THUS, the third and final episode of that strange drama which first came to the notice of history over four hundred years ago in an obscure Hungarian village and ended so very recently in a certain town near Paris, has been gathered from several sources.

I admit that liberties have been taken with portions of the narrative, which in the main is couched in my own words, in order to form a coherent tale that might be easily understood.

Regina Noel, my ward, whose story has been related in *The Return of the Master*,* furnished me much of the material that I have drawn upon, she having obtained it from the Master's own lips in her year of association with him. Obviously there were gaps in the Master's tale; many of them, in fact, for wherever discredit might be reflected upon himself he omitted those portions.

Also, Regina's memory is yet none too perfect and she had forgotten much. Wherefore, although spurred by the interesting fragments which she possessed I had flung myself into the task of writing them into a whole, so many of the essential bits of knowledge were missing that I found myself at a standstill.

At one time I despaired of ever securing enough to work with, so whipped my experiences in France into rough shape in order that those at least might be saved. Since then, I have formed the acquaintance of a Madame White, a spiritualist medium among other things and a dabbler in the occult strictly for the love of it. She is high in Theosophical circles, well read, highly intelligent and accomplished not only in the more curious arts, but also in the various forms of electrical science.

To her I owe the clue which has enabled the completion of the foregoing story, which bridges a gap of four hundred years, explains some of the witch mania of Seventeenth Century Europe, makes plain exactly who and what that dread being, the Master, really was and definitely decides the peculiar destiny of Ivga Brenryk—the Werewolf's daughter.

The key lay within that mysterious and ghastly book, innocent in appearance, but how terrible, formed as it was from a tanned human skin and so desperately desired that the Master dragged me across half a world to obtain it!*

Madame White has explained the method she used, but it is not very clear to me. Roughly the theory is as follows:

All inanimate objects possess a sort of slow, sluggish life, a personality, an individuality one might say, an ability to catch and preserve incidents that have taken place around them; a certain photographic aptness for retaining transitory events. Thus, when a camera is leveled at an object for the taking of a snapshot, not only the prepared sheet of film receives the impression, but also the wood, metal and cloth of the camera itself! The very walls which enclose you when this is read are receiving impressions of you and the objects within the room (which are in turn receiving impressions also) and filing them for ever and ever away, one superimposed upon another to an indefinite extent—

* In WEIRD TALES for July, 1927.

* *The Werewolf of Ponkert*, published in WEIRD TALES for July, 1925.

ready to be used by those who understand their value and means of reconstructing their past preserved pictures.

It would appear that even a stone has memories, which opens a vast field of inquiry. One would be interested, for instance, to discover the scenes that the Sphinx has witnessed through the centuries. May her secrets at last, by this method, be known!

Briefly, she gains her knowledge by placing herself closely to the object from which she wishes to learn, and while in a semi-conscious state she forms an inexplicable union with it. She claims that she and the object exchange personalities for the time being, she seeing the scenes that *it* has beheld and living among them as a spectator.

This seems a trifle too wild even for me. I prefer to believe that this is all a blind expressly to bewilder me and her real method is a simpler one, akin to clairvoyancy or second sight, she reading these faint impressions by a sort of sixth sense, that are too weak for an ordinary person to perceive. I slept for three nights with the book beneath my head, but got nothing but a splitting headache for my pains.

Madame White at her first trial gave me such a revolting description of a man being flayed alive that it fairly made me ill!

After many of these so-called "unions" I had the story nearly complete; the things that the book had "seen" fitting together with that which Regina told me and other facts which I already knew from my studies. Still there were blank spots, and on these I have been obliged to use imagination to fill in if I would give a realistic picture of the period. I crave the license ordinarily given to poets, in the reading of this. Try and approach the tale with an open mind, for at the worst it may entertain and there is food for thought within it.

The Babylonian's warning in Chapter Seven, received entirely through Madame White (the book slung from the scaffold having apparently caught and held the very words) is a most remarkable bit of prophecy. Yet I think he laid altogether too much stress on the part "the stranger from an unknown land" was to play. Those who have read *The Return of the Master* will recall that as a conqueror of the Master I cut a poor figure as a hero, most of my time being spent dodging or running away from something or other, the real fighting being done for me. The general trend of his prediction, however, as any who are at all familiar with mediæval European history will notice, befell as the Babylonian foretold.

You may search the books and records of the period, both in France and Hungary, for any mention of these happenings, but unless you meet with better fortune than we have had, your search will be in vain.

History is discreetly silent upon the primary cause of the frightful persecutions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. The Master is never referred to in any form, religious mania, ignorance, and superstition being blamed instead.

There has been much discussion in recent years on the *causes* of that wave of psychic panic which passed over Christendom in these centuries and was as marked on the continent of Europe as in Great Britain and New England.

It is of course a mistake to think of witchcraft as a mediæval superstition, for comparatively little is heard of it in the Middle Ages; the great witchcraft furor originated in the Sixteenth Century and lasted, perhaps, less than a hundred years. Is it not curious that it attacked

Catholics equally with Protestants, and the Latin races equally with the Teutonic?

Would it be too bold to advance the theory that perhaps for the first time in history the Master found the exactly suitable conditions for his ghastly purpose of revenge upon the human race?

Thus, where before his victims had been numbered in sevens, that number of occult significance, his influence from a small beginning spread and circled and continually spread, each sufferer infecting others with his disease in that poisonous atmosphere of bigotry, superstition and intolerance. The innocent perished with the guilty; everyone who had grudges straightway pointed the finger of accusation at his enemy. Thus the toll mounted into thousands and tens of thousands.

"Witch?" "Wizard?" "Sorcerer?" "Werewolf?" "Vampire?" "Warlock?" "To the stake then with this monster!" "Great day tomorrow! Sport for all!" "Another demon found, tried and sentenced!" "Death to them!"

So the general trend of thought ran from the year 1524 in Como, Italy, where one thousand persons were put to death in one year and about one hundred every year after for several years. In Lorraine so many were banished from the country that whole towns were on the point of becoming desolate. There nine hundred people, so boasts the learned inquisitor Remigius, were put to death by him alone in fifteen years.

In England from 1600 to 1680 the average number of executions reached the terrific height of five hundred annually, so that about forty-two thousand witches were burnt in the presence of a delighted audience numbering thousands of people. The madness died very gradually and even broke out rampantly in Germany in 1740.

During the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1800, the true "children of the kirk" of Scotland regarded themselves as the excellent ones of the Earth, all others being but slaves of Satan. It was generally believed that evil spirits were roaming about with Satan at their head and that these spirits assumed various forms, *such as a black dog* or even a bull.

Belief in witch animals still persists among the uneducated classes in parts of the United Kingdom.

Does not the theory help to explain?

The Salem trials in this country were nearly the last of the sporadic outbreaks that occurred as reason began to dominate superstition and the old ideas to lose their power. The new enlightenment can be laid to the opening of the Mechanical Age. Machines and fancies do not seem to get along well with each other, and only the more backward peoples have now such beliefs. The old gods are dead and a new one commands obedience.

Perhaps the old ways were better, but those days were dark and bloody, and who would change if he could?

And now the Master has left our world, let us hope, for ever. The Master! That tragic, sinister, cruel being, that mysterious creature who was betrayed and forced into ways that delivered a staggering blow to civilization upon this planet. That we have recovered is no honor to us. One being, no matter how powerful, can not conquer a world!

Though his final effort might have succeeded for a time in France, his success could not have been other than temporary. We have too many weapons, instant communication between localities and intelligent scientists, for such a desperate attempt as he made in starting a pack of werewolves in this age, to succeed. He had his chance and failed.

But I have wandered far from the track.

As has been said, there is practically no proof of this tale unless you can read a little proof into the following facts which have been taken from a number of sources. Ponkert I have found on no map, nor another reference to it outside of the odd book. Probably the name has been changed, with the passing of years; still it might be found by means of the mountain which Madame White describes. Mountains, near a river, with the peak split in twain, can not be common. There, if anywhere, proof might be obtained.

Madame White states definitely that the young Frenchman came from Blois and returned to the home of his father.

Years later, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* Blois was known as the city of werewolves, due to the numbers of these creatures in and about the city.

The narrative states that the young Frenchman's name was Gunnar.

In the records of the city, we find a bare notice of a couple by that name. There were seven sons, at the death of the old couple in the year 1547, who separated and were heard of no more; their land was sold and that branch of the family passed from existence. Again the recurrent seven!

Now I think it is not too unreasonable to suppose that Ivga (granting this couple to be the same which figure in the story) would have disclosed this curse to her sons before she died, perhaps in that moment recalling the unholy bargain she had made for her life, as the Master had promised she would remember.

Awed by their peril, they must have fled in many directions, each changing his name slightly to throw his pursuer off the track.

Freed from his promise by Ivga's death, the Master would have left the place where he was then amusing himself (Como?) and begun his work of stamping out the accursed line.

You will find that these facts strangely agree with Madame White's and Regina Noel's composite story, and with the details of the other accounts you have read.

To me they seem to bridge a great gap.

[THE END]

A Brief Tale Is

POISON

By JACK SNOW

NO, IT wasn't on Sara's account that Cristin was doing it. Sara simply had been the last straw. He had nothing left to cling to now—nothing more to live for. He took out a small bottle from his pocket, and stared at it. He pulled the cork, and smelled its contents. It smelled of almonds and was colorless as water. He recorked the bottle and placed it carefully in his pocket again. He had got it this morning from the druggist. The stupid fool had gaped at him when he asked for it, but he had got it all right. There was enough poison there, he was sure, for six men.

Cristin looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to 12. At 12, on the last stroke of the bell, he would remove the cork, and swallow the colorless liquid. Then—God!—he would be well out of it. Perhaps he would be able to watch over Sara; perhaps he might sing to her in her sleep and bring her beautiful dreams.

Cristin was a strange, bright-eyed young man. His eyes were palely green, and some of the folks about town were wont to trace his eccentricities and queer actions to the depths of his gleaming pupils. They said he was mad. That was the reputation he had earned himself by giving way to violent fits of revolt and stormy passion against himself and his world.

And now, Cristin stood stiffly staring before him. The wide window was opened, and a slight summer breeze stroked the draperies with a gentle undulating motion. He stared up at the heavens. All this—the crescent moon, the vari-pointed stars, the deep velvet blue, the low murmuring wind—all would be alien to him in a few minutes. He was going to die at the stroke of the clock. He was calm; it would all go off quietly. What was the use of making a fuss? A few years more or less, what could it matter? Tears sparkled in his eyes.

The clock was striking: ten—eleven—twelve. He uncorked the bottle and raised it to his lips. The liquid went down easily, leaving the characteristic almond taint of the poison in his nostrils. He felt the unmistakable puckering of his lips and mouth. He was trembling and cold. Could it be that he was dying so soon?

He sat down on the edge of the mounded white bed. How like a shroud it looked, concealing some gigantic bloated corpse! He arose again, and walked to the window. He could not remain still: action, motion were what he wanted. And so he was to die tonight, he thought. Had the insidious poison already spread through his system? Was this, indeed, his last night, his last hour among familiar, homely things? Was all to be changed now? Was nothing ever to be the same? Was he to die tonight? God! He could scarcely bring himself to believe it.

A thousand thoughts rushed through his mind—things he had forgotten. He had not written to his sister. He had meant to write: he must do so before he could die. And his papers—he had forgotten to stop them: they would keep on coming until his room was filled to the ceiling. But why did he think of such

things now that he was to die? All was to be changed now.

Cristin looked out into the night. How queerly, how vaporously the stars twinkled; they seemed to be dripping starlight! And what a wind that was whistling through the tree tops! What a wild, roaring wind! And—oh God!—he could feel no wind at all. And all those purple clouds hovering so low—what were they? Surely such clouds had never been seen before. They were hollow, and reddish purple, ominous, feverish-looking things. Cristin clenched his fists and turned from the window, although the sound of the roaring wind still filled his head. So he was really going to die tonight!

It was almost dark in the room, except for the moonlight, and the various objects took on strange and grotesque shapes. Nothing was the same now—nothing would ever be the same. All was changed and strange.

What were those long, thin shadows there in the corner by the window. They were writhing and groping up the side of the wall like huge serpents. He stared palely through the gloom and then sighed. It was the plants, the flowers and ferns in the pots. How they were growing! Up the wall they crept—up—up. Now they were spreading over the ceiling. A terrific odor assailed his nostrils. It was the mighty sweetness of the lavender narcissus towering above him like a small tree. The fern was still growing, mounting higher and higher, interlacing its festoons and weaving about over the ceiling. Would it never cease its wild growth? He could hear its tendrils cracking and unfolding. The room looked like a greenhouse.

And then Cristin shook himself He was allowing his fancy to play tricks on him again. He must control himself. But then if only fancy, pure and simple it were, what a mad one! What a strange delirium of a dying mind! That was it: he was dying. All this was only natural; he must resign himself to its weirdness. Dying he was, tonight. Oh, God! surely not tonight! not this night! No, no, this was too strange, too terrible. Give him a few hours, just until morning. Only a few brief hours, let him have tonight.

He would not die tonight, he would not. No, no, he would *live*. He would bring the poison up. Yes, by all the demons of hell it should come up. He would not die, he would *not*. But oh, how the wind roared and moaned, and the purple clouds were gathering thicker and thicker!

Cristin stood trembling and perspiring with desperation. Water, water he wanted. Water would bring it up. He must have water. He started toward the door, and then whirled around, gasping. Where was the door? It should be there by the bureau, he remembered. But it was gone: only the smooth paper was there. Where was it? He groped wildly about the room, feeling with his hands, and stumbling over chairs and stands. This continued for some minutes as Cristin rushed frantically about the room, but at last he gave it up. He fell on the bed trembling and sobbing. He was a prisoner—a prisoner in his own room, and he must have water.

Sobs deep and long racked his body, and then at last he sat up and stared up at the wall. There was a picture, he muttered to himself, a picture of a beautiful green meadow with a gurgling, singing stream flowing through it. There were golden yellow buttercups and sweet nodding daisies growing on its banks. A calm, china-blue sky and white billowing clouds floated serenely above. There was water, and escape from death—miserable, ratlike death. What a haven! He seized a chair and placed it underneath the picture. He climbed upon the chair, and gazed into the picture for several minutes.

How clear and sparkling the water

was! How it would cool his poor brain, and soothe his fevered lips! He grasped the edges of the picture frame in his hands and stared eagerly, thirstily, at the picture. And then, suddenly, he felt himself dangling in the air. He must have kicked the chair from under him, he thought. He looked down; but no, there it was—but oh, how far below him! And how vast, how immense the room had become, and the picture—the picture was plunging toward him at a terrific speed; he could hear the water rushing between the banks of the stream. He was still dangling in the air, in space. Things were gigantic, were becoming huger and more Gargantuan every moment; or wait—could it be that *he* was growing *smaller?* Yes, that must be it. The trouble was not with the room and his surroundings, but with himself. It was the effect of that devil's poison. It was shrinking him up, smaller and smaller.

There was only one thing for Cristin to do. He pulled himself up over the edge of the monstrous picture frame, and tumbled forward upon the grass. He was in a meadow. Several hundred feet away flowed a clear, sparkling stream. He was walking toward the stream. What a blue sky was above, and what sweet, fresh air, stirred only by a gentle fanning breeze! And birds sang—lovely, trilling notes.

The next day the news of Cristin's death was made known and spread generally over the town. When it reached the old druggist, he was shaken and bewildered for a moment. Then he retired to the depths of his dark, ill-smelling shop, mumbling and rubbing his chin in perplexity.

"Strange," he muttered to himself; "he should have known I wouldn't sell him prussic acid, knowing him as well as I did. But now, how the devil did he kill himself with a bottle rinsed out with almond oil, and filled up with water?"

The Monster-Maker

By W. C. MORROW

A YOUNG man of refined appearance, but evidently suffering great mental distress, presented himself one morning at the residence of a singular old man, who was known as a surgeon of remarkable skill. The house was a queer and primitive brick affair, entirely out of date, and tolerable only in the decayed part of the city in which it stood. It was large, gloomy, and dark, and had long corridors and dis-

mal rooms; and it was absurdly large for the small family—man and wife—that occupied it. The house described, the man is portrayed—but not the woman. He could be agreeable on occasion, but, for all that, he was but animated mystery. His wife was weak, wan, reticent, evidently miserable, and possibly living a life of dread or horror—perhaps witness of repulsive things, subject of anxieties, and victim of fear and tyranny; but there is a great deal of guessing in these assumptions. He was about sixty-five years of age and she about forty. He was lean, tall, and bald, with thin, smooth-shaven face, and very keen eyes; he kept always at home, and was slovenly. The man was strong, the woman weak; he dominated, she suffered.

Although he was a surgeon of rare skill, his practise was almost nothing, for it was a rare occurrence that the few who knew of his great ability were brave enough to penetrate the gloom of his house, and when they did so it was with deaf ear turned to sundry ghoulish stories that were whispered concerning him. These were, in great part, but exaggerations of his experiments in vivisection; he was devoted to the science of surgery.

The young man who presented himself on the morning just mentioned was a handsome fellow, yet of evident weak character and unhealthy temperament—sensitive, and easily exalted or depressed. A single glance convinced the surgeon that his visitor was seriously affected in mind, for there was never bolder skull-grin of melancholia, fixed and irremediable.

A stranger would not have suspected any occupancy of the house. The street door—old, warped, and blistered by the sun—was locked, and the small, faded-green window-blinds were closed. The young man rapped at the door. No answer. He rapped again. Still no sign. He examined a slip of paper, glanced at the number on the house, and then, with the impatience of a child, he furiously kicked the door. There were signs of numerous other such kicks. A response came in the shape of a shuffling footstep in the hall, a turning of the rusty key, and a sharp face that peered through a cautious opening in the door.

"Are you the doctor?" asked the young man.

"Yes, yes! Come in," briskly replied the master of the house.

The young man entered. The old surgeon closed the door and carefully locked it. "This way," he said, advancing to a rickety flight of stairs. The young man followed. The surgeon led the way up the stairs, turned into a narrow, musty-smelling corridor at the left, traversed it, rattling the loose boards under his feet, at the farther end opened a door at the right, and beckoned his visitor to enter. The young man found himself in a pleasant room, furnished in antique fashion and with hard simplicity.

"Sit down," said the old man, placing a chair so that its occupant should face a window that looked out upon a dead wall about six feet from the house. He threw open the blind, and a pale light entered. He then seated himself near his visitor and directly facing him, and with a searching look, that had all the power of a microscope, he proceeded to diagnosticate the case.

"Well?" he presently asked.

The young man shifted uneasily in his seat.

"I—I have come to see you," he finally stammered, "because I'm in trouble."

"Ah!"

"Yes; you see, I—that is—I have given it up."

"Ah!" There was pity added to sympathy in the ejaculation.

"That's it. Given it up," added the visitor. He took from his pocket a roll of banknotes, and with the

utmost deliberation he counted them out upon his knee. "Five thousand dollars," he calmly remarked. "That is for you. It's all I have; but I presume—I imagine—no; that is not the word—*assume*—yes; that's the word—assume that five thousand—is it really that much? Let me count." He counted again. "That five thousand dollars is a sufficient fee for what I want you to do."

The surgeon's lips curled pityingly—perhaps disdainfully also. "What do you want me to do?" he carelessly inquired.

The young man rose, looked around with a mysterious air, approached the surgeon, and laid the money across his knee. Then he stooped and whispered two words in the surgeon's ear.

These words produced an electric effect. The old man started violently; then, springing to his feet, he caught his visitor angrily, and transfixed him with a look that was as sharp as a knife. His eyes flashed, and he opened his mouth to give utterance to some harsh imprecation, when he suddenly checked himself. The anger left his face, and only pity remained. He relinquished his grasp, picked up the scattered notes, and, offering them to the visitor, slowly said:

"I do not want your money. You are simply foolish. You think you are in trouble. Well, you do not know what trouble is. Your only trouble is that you have not a trace of manhood in your nature. You are merely insane—I shall not say pusillanimous. You should surrender yourself to the authorities, and be sent to a lunatic asylum for proper treatment."

The young man keenly felt the intended insult, and his eyes flashed dangerously.

"You old dog—you insult me thus!" he cried. "Grand airs, these, you give yourself! Virtuously indignant, old murderer, you! Don't want my money, eh? When a man comes to you himself and wants it done, you fly into a passion and spurn his money; but let an enemy of his come and pay you, and you are only too willing. How many such jobs have you done in this miserable old hole? It is a good thing for you that the police have not run you down, and brought spade and shovel with them. Do you know what is said of you? Do you think you have kept your windows so closely shut that no sound has ever penetrated beyond them? Where do you keep your infernal implements?"

He had worked himself into a high passion. His voice was hoarse, loud, and rasping. His eyes, bloodshot, started from their sockets. His whole frame twitched, and his fingers writhed. But he was in the presence of a man infinitely his superior. Two eyes, like those of a snake, burned two holes through him. An overmastering, inflexible presence confronted one weak and passionate.

"Sit down," commanded the stern voice of the surgeon.

It was the voice of father to child, of master to slave. The fury left the visitor, who, weak and overcome, fell upon a chair.

Meanwhile, a peculiar light had appeared in the old surgeon's face, the dawn of a strange idea; a gloomy ray, strayed from the fires of the bottomless pit; the baleful light that illumines the way of the enthusiast. The old man remained a moment in profound abstraction, gleams of eager intelligence bursting momentarily through the cloud of somber meditation that covered his face. Then broke the broad light of a deep, impenetrable determination. There was something sinister in it, suggesting the sacrifice of something held sacred. After a struggle, mind had vanquished conscience.

Taking a piece of paper and a pencil, the surgeon carefully wrote answers to questions which he peremptorily addressed to his visitor, such as

his name, age, place of residence, occupation, and the like, and the same inquiries concerning his parents, together with other particular matters.

"Does any one know you came to this house?" he asked.

"No."

"You swear it?"

"Yes."

"But your prolonged absence will cause alarm and lead to search."

"I have provided against that."

"How?"

"By depositing a note in the post, as I came along, announcing my intention to drown myself."

"The river will be dragged."

"What then?" asked the young man, shrugging his shoulders with careless indifference. "Rapid undercurrent, you know. A good many are never found."

There was a pause.

"Are you ready?" finally asked the surgeon.

"Perfectly." The answer was cool and determined.

The manner of the surgeon, however, showed much perturbation. The pallor that had come into his face at the moment his decision was formed became intense. A nervous tremulousness came over his frame. Above it all shone the light of enthusiasm.

"Have you a choice in the method?" he asked.

"Yes; extreme anesthesia."

"With what agent?"

"The surest and quickest."

"Do you desire any—any subsequent disposition?"

"No; only nullification; simply a blowing out, as of a candle in the wind; a puff—then darkness, without a trace. A sense of your own safety may suggest the method. I leave it to you."

"No delivery to your friends?"

"None whatever."

Another pause.

"Did you say you are quite ready?" asked the surgeon.

"Quite ready."

"And perfectly willing?"

"Anxious."

"Then wait a moment."

With this request the old surgeon rose to his feet and stretched himself. Then with the stealthiness of a cat he opened the door and peered into the hall, listening intently. There was no sound. He softly closed the door and locked it. Then he closed the window-blinds and locked them. This done, he opened a door leading into an adjoining room, which, though it had no window, was lighted by means of a small skylight. The young man watched closely. A strange change had come over him. While his determination had not one whit lessened, a look of great relief came into his face, displacing the haggard, despairing look of a half-hour before. Melancholic then, he was ecstatic now.

The opening of the second door disclosed a curious sight. In the center of the room, directly under the skylight, was an operating-table, such as is used by demonstrators of anatomy. A glass case against the wall held surgical instruments of every kind. Hanging in another case were human skeletons of various sizes. In sealed jars, arranged on shelves, were monstrosities of divers kinds preserved in alcohol. There were also, among innumerable other articles scattered about the room, a manikin, a stuffed cat, a desiccated human heart, plaster casts of various parts of the body, numerous charts, and a large assortment of drugs and chemicals. There was also a lounge, which could be opened to form a couch. The surgeon opened it and moved the operating-table aside, giving its place to the lounge.

"Come in," he called to his visitor.

The young man obeyed without the least hesitation.

"Take off your coat."

He complied.

"Lie down on that lounge."

In a moment the young man was stretched at full length, eyeing the surgeon. The latter undoubtedly was suffering under great excitement, but he did not waver; his movements were sure and quick. Selecting a bottle containing a liquid, he carefully measured out a certain quantity. While doing this he asked:

"Have you ever had any irregularity of the heart?"

"No."

The answer was prompt, but it was immediately followed by a quizzical look in the speaker's face.

"I presume," he added, "you mean by your question that it might be dangerous to give me a certain drug. Under the circumstances, however, I fail to see any relevancy in your question."

This took the surgeon aback; but he hastened to explain that he did not wish to inflict unnecessary pain, and hence his question.

He placed the glass on a stand, approached his visitor, and carefully examined his pulse.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"Why?"

"It is perfectly normal."

"Because I am wholly resigned. Indeed, it has been long since I knew such happiness. It is not active, but infinitely sweet."

"You have no lingering desire to retract?"

"None whatever."

The surgeon went to the stand and returned with the draft.

"Take this," he said, kindly.

The young man partially raised himself and took the glass in his hand. He did not show the vibration of a single nerve. He drank the liquid, draining the last drop. Then he returned the glass with a smile.

"Thank you," he said; "you are the noblest man that lives. May you always prosper and be happy! You are my benefactor, my liberator. Bless you, bless you! You reach down from your seat with the gods and lift me up into glorious peace and rest. I love you—I love you with all my heart!"

These words, spoken earnestly, in a musical, low voice, and accompanied with a smile of ineffable tenderness, pierced the old man's heart. A suppressed convulsion swept over him; intense anguish wrung his vitals; perspiration trickled down his face. The young man continued to smile.

"Ah, it does me good!" said he.

The surgeon, with a strong effort to control himself, sat down upon the edge of the lounge and took his visitor's wrist, counting the pulse.

"How long will it take?" the young man asked.

"Ten minutes. Two have passed." The voice was hoarse.

"Ah, only eight minutes more! . . . Delicious, delicious! I feel it coming. . . . What was that? . . . Ah, I understand. Music . . . beautiful! . . . Coming, coming. . . . Is that—that—water? . . . Trickling? Dropping? Doctor!"

"Well?"

"Thank you, thank you. . . . Noble man . . . my savior . . . my bene . . . factor. . . . Trickling . . . trickling. . . . Dripping, dripping. . . . Doctor!"

"Well?"

"Doctor!"

"Past hearing," muttered the surgeon.

"Doctor!"

"And blind."

Response was made by a firm grasp of the hand.

"Doctor!"

"And numb."

"Doctor!"

The old man watched and waited.

"Dripping . . . dripping."

The last drop had run. There was a sigh, and nothing more.

The surgeon laid down the hand.

"The first step," he groaned, rising to his feet; then his whole frame dilated. "The first step—the most

difficult, yet the simplest. A providential delivery into my hands of that for which I have hungered for forty years. No withdrawal now! It is possible, because scientific; rational, but perilous. If I succeed—*if!* I *shall* succeed. I *will* succeed. . . . And after success—what? . . . Yes; what? Publish the plan and the result? The gallows. . . . So long as *it* shall exist, and *I* exist, the gallows. That much. . . . But how account for its presence? Ah, that pinches hard! I must trust to the future."

He tore himself from the revery and started.

"I wonder if *she* heard or saw anything."

With that reflection he cast a glance upon the form on the lounge, and then left the room, locked the door, locked also the door of the outer room, walked down two or three corridors, penetrated to a remote part of the house, and rapped at a door. It was opened by his wife. He, by this time, had regained complete mastery over himself.

"I thought I heard someone in the house just now," he said, "but I can find no one."

"I heard nothing."

He was greatly relieved.

"I did hear someone knock at the door less than an hour ago," she resumed, "and heard you speak, I think. Did he come in?"

"No."

The woman glanced at his feet and seemed perplexed.

"I am almost certain," she said, "that I heard footfalls in the house, and yet I see that you are wearing slippers."

"Oh, I had on my shoes then!"

"That explains it," said the woman, satisfied; "I think the sound you heard must have been caused by rats."

"Ah, that was it!" exclaimed the surgeon. Leaving, he closed the door, reopened it, and said, "I do not wish to be disturbed today." He said to himself, as he went down the hall, "All is clear there."

He returned to the room in which his visitor lay, and made a careful examination.

"Splendid specimen!" he softly exclaimed; "every organ sound, every function perfect; fine, large frame; well-shaped muscles, strong and sinewy; capable of wonderful development—if given opportunity. . . . I have no doubt it can be done. Already I have succeeded with a dog—a task less difficult than this, for in a man the cerebrum overlaps the cerebellum, which is not the case with a dog. This gives a wide range for accident, with but one opportunity in a lifetime! In the cerebrum, the intellect and the affections; in the cerebellum, the senses and the motor forces; in the medulla oblongata, control of the diaphragm. In these two latter lie all the essentials of simple existence. The cerebrum is merely an adornment; that is to say, reason and the affections are almost purely ornamental. I have already proved it. My dog, with its cerebrum removed, was idiotic, but it retained its physical senses to a certain degree."

While thus ruminating he made careful preparations. He moved the couch, replaced the operating-table under the skylight, selected a number of surgical instruments, prepared certain drug-mixtures, and arranged water, towels, and all the accessories of a tedious surgical operation. Suddenly he burst into laughter.

"Poor fool!" he exclaimed. "Paid me five thousand dollars to kill him! Didn't have the courage to snuff his own candle! Singular, singular, the queer freaks these madmen have! You thought you were dying, poor idiot! Allow me to inform you, sir, that you are as much alive at this moment as ever you were in your life. But it will be all the same to you. You shall never be more conscious than you are now; and for all practical purposes, so far as they concern

you, you are dead henceforth, though you shall live. By the way, how should you feel *without a head?* Ha, ha, ha! . . . But that's a sorry joke."

He lifted the unconscious form from the lounge and laid it upon the operating-table.

About three years afterward the following conversation was held between a captain of police and a detective:

"She may be insane," suggested the captain.

"I think she is."

"And yet you credit her story!"

"I do."

"Singular!"

"Not at all. I myself have learned something."

"What?"

"Much, in one sense; little, in another. You have heard those queer stories of her husband. Well, they are all nonsensical—probably with one exception. He is generally a harmless old fellow, but peculiar. He has performed some wonderful surgical operations. The people in his neighborhood are ignorant, and they fear him and wish to be rid of him; hence they tell a great many lies about him, and they come to believe their own stories. The one important thing that I have learned is that he is almost insanely enthusiastic on the subject of surgery—especially experimental surgery; and with an enthusiast there is hardly such a thing as a scruple. It is this that gives me confidence in the woman's story."

"You say she appeared to be frightened?"

"Doubly so—first, she feared that her husband would learn of her betrayal of him; second, the discovery itself had terrified her."

"But her report of this discovery is very vague," argued the captain. "He conceals everything from her. She is merely guessing."

"In part—yes; in other part—no. She heard the sounds distinctly, though she did not see clearly. Horror closed her eyes. What she thinks she saw is, I admit, preposterous; but she undoubtedly saw something extremely frightful. There are many peculiar little circumstances. He has eaten with her but few times during the last three years, and nearly always carries his food to his private rooms. She says that he either consumes an enormous quantity, throws much away, or is feeding something that eats prodigiously. He explains this to her by saying that he has animals with which he experiments. This is not true. Again, he always keeps the door to these rooms carefully locked; and not only that, but he has had the doors doubled and otherwise strengthened, and has heavily barred a window that looks from one of the rooms upon a dead wall a few feet distant."

"What does it mean?" asked the captain.

"A prison."

"For animals, perhaps."

"Certainly not."

"Why?"

"Because, in the first place, cages would have been better; in the second place, the security that he has provided is infinitely greater than that required for the confinement of ordinary animals."

"All this is easily explained: he has a violent lunatic under treatment."

"I had thought of that, but such is not the fact."

"How do you know?"

"By reasoning thus: He has always refused to treat cases of lunacy; he confines himself to surgery; the walls are not padded, for the woman has heard sharp blows upon them; no human strength, however morbid, could possibly require such resisting strength as has been provided; he would not be likely to conceal a lunatic's confinement from the woman; no lunatic could consume all the food that he provides; so extremely violent mania as these precautions indicate could not continue three years; if

there is a lunatic in the case it is very probable that there should have been communication with someone outside concerning the patient, and there has been none; the woman has listened at the keyhole and has heard no human voice within; and last, we have heard the woman's vague description of what she saw."

"You have destroyed every possible theory," said the captain, deeply interested, "and have suggested nothing new."

"Unfortunately, I can not; but the truth may be very simple, after all. The old surgeon is so peculiar that I am prepared to discover something remarkable."

"Have you suspicions?"

"I have."

"Of what?"

"A crime. The woman suspects it."

"And betrays it?"

"Certainly, because it is so horrible that her humanity revolts; so terrible that her whole nature demands of her that she hand over the criminal t. the law; so frightful that she is in mortal terror; so awful that it has shaken her mind."

"What do you propose to do?" asked the captain.

"Secure evidence. I may need help."

"You shall have all the men you require. Go ahead, but be careful. You are on dangerous ground. You would be a mere plaything in the hands of that man."

Two days afterward the detective again sought the captain.

"I have a queer document," he said, exhibiting torn fragments of paper, on which there was writing. "The woman stole it and brought it to me. She snatched a handful out of a book, getting only a part of each of a few leaves."

These fragments, which the men arranged as best they could, were (the detective explained) torn by the surgeon's wife from the first volume of a number of manuscript books which her husband had written on one subject,—the very one that was the cause of her excitement.

"About the time that he began a certain experiment three years ago," continued the detective, "he removed everything from the suite of two rooms containing his study and his operating-room. In one of the bookcases that he removed to a room across the passage was a drawer, which he kept locked, but which he opened from time to time. As is quite common with such pieces of furniture, the lock of the drawer is a very poor one; and so the woman, while making a thorough search yesterday, found a key on her bunch that fitted this lock. She opened the drawer, drew out the bottom book of a pile (so that its mutilation would more likely escape discovery), saw that it might contain a clue, and tore out a handful of the leaves. She had barely replaced the book, locked the drawer, and made her escape when her husband appeared. He hardly ever allows her to be out of his sight when she is in that part of the house."

The fragments read as follows: " . . . the motory nerves. I had hardly dared to hope for such a result, although inductive reasoning had convinced me of its possibility, my only doubt having been on the score of my lack of skill. Their operation has been only slightly impaired, and even this would not have been the case had the operation been performed in infancy, before the intellect had sought and obtained recognition as an essential part of the whole. Therefore I state, as a oved fact, that the cells of the motory nerves have inherent forces sufficient to the purposes of those nerves. But hardly so with the sensory nerves. These latter are, in fact, an offshoot of the former, evolved from them by natural (though not essential) heterogeneity, and to a certain extent are dependent on the

evolution and expansion of a contemporaneous tendency, that developed into mentality, or mental function. Both of these latter tendencies, these evolvements, are merely refinements of the motory system, and not independent entities; that is to say, they are the blossoms of a plant that propagates from its roots. The motory system is the first . . .

" . . . nor am I surprized that such prodigious muscular energy is developing. It promises yet to surpass the wildest dreams of human strength. I account for it thus: The powers of assimilation had reached their full development. They had formed the habit of doing a certain amount of work. They sent their products to all parts of the system. As a result of my operation the consumption of these products was reduced fully one-half; that is to say, about one-half of the demand for them was withdrawn. But force of habit required the production to proceed. This production was strength, vitality, energy. Thus double the usual quantity of this strength, this energy, was stored in the remaining . . .

" . . . developed a tendency that did surprize me. Nature, no longer suffering the distraction of extraneous interferences, and at the same time being cut in two (as it were), with reference to this case, did not fully adjust herself to the new situation, as does a magnet, which, when divided at the point of equilibrium, renews itself in its two fragments by investing each with opposite poles; but, on the contrary, being severed from laws that theretofore had controlled her, and possessing still that mysterious tendency to develop into something more potential and complex, she blindly (having lost her lantern) pushed her demands for material that would secure this development, and as blindly used it when it was given her. Hence this marvelous voracity, this insatiable hunger, this wonderful ravenousness; and hence also (there being nothing but the physical part to receive this vast storing of energy) this strength that is becoming almost hourly herculean, almost daily appalling. It is becoming a serious . . .

" . . . narrow escape today. By some means, while I was absent, it unscrewed the stopper of the silver feeding-pipe (which I have already herein termed 'the artificial mouth'), and, in one of its curious antics, allowed all the chyle to escape from its stomach through the tube. Its hunger then became intense—I may say furious. I placed my hands upon it to push it into a chair, when, feeling my touch, it caught me, clasped me around the neck, and would have crushed me to death instantly had I not slipped from its powerful grasp. Thus I always had to be on my guard. I have provided the screw stopper with a spring catch, and . . .

" . . . usually docile when not hungry; slow and heavy in its movements, which are, of course, purely unconscious; any apparent excitement in movement being due to local irregularities in the blood-supply of the cerebellum, which, if I did not have it enclosed in a silver case that is immovable, I should expose and . . . "

The captain looked at the detective with a puzzled air.

"I don't understand it at all," said he.

"Nor I," agreed the detective.

"What do you propose to do?"

"Make a raid."

"Do you want a man?"

"Three. The strongest men in your district."

"Why, the surgeon is old and weak!"

"Nevertheless, I want three strong men; and for that matter, prudence really advises me to take twenty."

At one o'clock the next morning a cautious, scratching sound might have been heard in the ceiling of the surgeon's operating-room. Shortly afterward the skylight sash was care-

fully raised and laid aside. A man peered into the opening. Nothing could be heard.

"That is singular," thought the detective.

He cautiously lowered himself to the floor by a rope, and then stood for some moments listening intently. There was a dead silence. He shot the slide of a dark-lantern, and rapidly swept the room with the light. It was bare, with the exception of a strong iron staple and ring, screwed to the floor in the center of the room, with a heavy chain attached. The detective then turned his attention to the outer room; it was perfectly bare. He was deeply perplexed. Returning to the inner room, he called softly to the men to descend. While they were thus occupied he re-entered the outer room and examined the door. A glance sufficed. It was kept closed by a spring attachment, and was locked with a strong spring-lock that could be drawn from the inside.

"The bird has just flown," mused the detective. "A singular accident! The discovery and proper use of this thumb-bolt might not have happened once in fifty years, if my theory is correct."

By this time the men were behind him. He noiselessly drew the spring-bolt, opened the door, and looked out into the hall. He heard a peculiar sound. It was as though a gigantic lobster were floundering and scrambling in some distant part of the old house. Accompanying this sound was a loud, whistling breathing, and frequent rasping gasps.

These sounds were heard by still another person—the surgeon's wife; for they originated very near her rooms, which were a considerable distance from her husband's. She had been sleeping lightly, tortured by fear and harassed by frightful dreams. The conspiracy into which she had recently entered, for the destruction of her husband, was a source of great anxiety. She constantly suffered from the most gloomy forebodings, and lived in an atmosphere of terror. Added to the natural horror of her situation were those countless sources of fear which a fright-shaken mind creates and then magnifies. She was, indeed, in a pitiable state, having been driven first by terror to desperation, and then to madness.

Startled thus out of fitful slumber by the noise at her door, she sprang from her bed to the floor, every terror that lurked in her acutely tense mind and diseased imagination starting up and almost overwhelming her. The idea of flight—one of the strongest of all instincts—seized upon her, and she ran to the door, beyond all control of reason. She drew the bolt and flung the door wide open, and then fled wildly down the passage, the appalling hissing and rasping gurgle ringing in her ears apparently with a thousandfold intensity. But the passage was in absolute darkness, and she had not taken a half-dozen steps when she tripped upon an unseen object on the floor. She fell headlong upon it, encountering in it a large, soft, warm substance that writhed and squirmed, and from which came the sounds that had awakened her. Instantly realizing her situation, she uttered a shriek such as only an unnamable terror can inspire. But hardly had her cry started the echoes in the empty corridor than it was suddenly stifled. Two prodigious arms had closed upon her and crushed the life out of her.

The cry performed the office of directing the detective and his assistants, and it also aroused the old surgeon, who occupied rooms between the officers and the object of their search. The cry of agony pierced him to the marrow, and a realization of the cause of it burst upon him with frightful force.

"It has come at last!" he gasped, springing from his bed.

Snatching from a table a dimly burning lamp and a long knife which he had kept at hand for three years,

he dashed into the corridor. The four officers had already started forward, but when they saw him emerge they halted in silence. In that moment of stillness the surgeon paused to listen. He heard the hissing sound and the clumsy floundering of a bulky, living object in the direction of his wife's apartments. It evidently was advancing toward him. A turn in the corridor shut out the view. He turned up the light, which revealed a ghastly pallor in his face.

"Wife!" he called.

There was no response. He hurriedly advanced, the four men following quietly. He turned the angle of the corridor, and ran so rapidly that by the time the officers had come in sight of him again he was twenty steps away. He ran past a huge, shapeless object, sprawling, crawling, and floundering along, and arrived at the body of his wife.

He gave one horrified glance at her face, and staggered away. Then a fury seized him. Clutching the knife firmly, and holding the lamp aloft, he sprang toward the ungainly object in the corridor. It was then that the officers, still advancing cautiously, saw a little more clearly, though still indistinctly, the object of the surgeon's fury, and the cause of the look of unutterable anguish in his face. The hideous sight caused them to pause. They saw what appeared to be a man, yet evidently was not a man; huge, awkward, shapeless; a squirming, lurching, stumbling mass, completely naked. It raised its broad shoulders. *It had no head,* but instead of it a small metallic ball surmounting its massive neck.

"Devil!" exclaimed the surgeon, raising the knife.

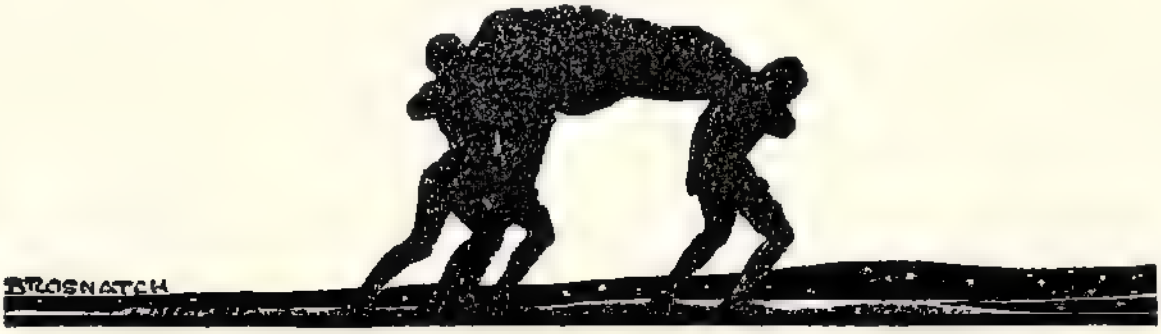
"Hold, there!" commanded a stern voice.

The surgeon quickly raised his eyes and saw the four officers, and for a moment fear paralyzed his arm.

"The police!" he gasped.

Then, with a look of redoubled fury, he sent the knife to the hilt into the squirming mass before him. The wounded monster sprang to its feet and wildly threw its arms about, meanwhile emitting fearful sounds from a silver tube through which it breathed. The surgeon aimed another blow, but never gave it. In his blind fury he lost his caution, and was caught in an iron grasp. The struggling threw the lamp some feet toward the officers, and it fell to the floor, shattered to pieces. Simultaneously with the crash the oil took fire, and the corridor was filled with flame. The officers could not approach. Before them was the spreading blaze, and secure behind it were two forms struggling in a fearful embrace. They heard cries and gasps, and saw the gleaming of a knife.

The wood in the house was old and dry. It took fire at once, and the flames spread with great rapidity. The four officers turned and fled, barely escaping with their lives. In an hour nothing remained of the mysterious old house and its inmates but a blackened ruin.



Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F. HARLOW

LILITH

STRANGELY interwoven are old myths regarding a fabulous animal called the lamia and an ancient demon—first feared by the Jews, and later by other people—whose name was Lilith. The beliefs about Lilith differ. Some of the old Rabbinical writers asserted that she was Adam's first wife, but that she forsook him and became a demon. The word Lilith in Hebrew means "night monster"; and the habitat of the fiend was supposed to be in deserted places.

The prophet Isaiah (chapter XXXIV, verse 14) in predicting the desolation of the land of Edom, said "Lilith shall dwell there." The King James translators rendered "Lilith" as "screech-owl"; whereby this harmless little bird is to this day feared by many, including our Southern negroes, as a harbinger of ill omen. But in the first Latin translation of the Christian scriptures, in the Fourth Century, the word Lilith was rendered "lamia."

Now, in Greek Legend, Lamia was a Libyan queen with whom the god, Jupiter, fell in love. Juno, out of jealousy, robbed Lamia of her children, whereupon she killed every child she could lay hands on, and became a hideous, child-devouring monster. As centuries passed, it was believed that she had a woman's face and a serpent's tail; and that she was also a sort of prototype of the modern vampire, taking the form of a beautiful woman and enticing young men to her embraces, to feed on their life and heart's blood.

The ancient Jews said that Lilith was especially dangerous to women and young children. She was eager to seize new-born children, and mothers and children were therefore provided with amulets against her. If a child smiled in its sleep during the night of the Sabbath or the New Moon, it was a sign that Lilith was playing with it.

Even as late as 1750 the lamia was thus described by an English zoologist: "The Lamia is believed to be the Creature mentioned in the 34th of Isaiah; called in Hebrew, Lilith. It is thought to be the swiftest of all four-footed Creatures, so that its Prey can seldom or never escape it. It is said to be bred in Libya; and to have a Face and Breasts like a very beautiful Woman: And by its Fraud, it destroys Men, for when it sees a Man, it entices him to draw near, and when it has him within Reach, it falls upon him and devours him. It has no Voice but that of hissing like a Serpent. Its hinder Parts are like a Goat's, its fore Legs like a Bear's; its Body is scaled all over. It is said they sometimes devour their own Young."

"THERE are four authors whose works I always look for with eager avidity in WEIRD TALES," writes N. S. Van, of Jamestown, New York. "They are H. P. Lovecraft, Frank B. Long, Jr., Seabury Quinn (or rather Jules de Grandin), and Edmond Hamilton. Lovecraft is the dark God of the Tomb, who hovers in the shadows of vaults and calls forth shapeless things from cold stars. Long is the God of hysterical madness, who whirls the reader into black woods with ghastly white trees and calls forth unnamable things from the depths of space who prod into the mad brain with icy fingers. Hamilton is the Thunder-God, who rushes into the depths of the universe and fights strange beings who twist giant suns out of their corners and send them hurtling madly away."

Writes H. F. Scotten, from Indianapolis: "I have read all of the October number except Munn's story, *The Werewolf's Daughter*, which I expect to be good. Sort of saving the heart of the melon to the last, as it were. Quinn's *Restless Souls* was the best of the de Grandin stories to date. I think the story that entertained and impressed me most, however—due no doubt to my love of the unusual in plots regardless of flowery language or literary brilliance—was *The Incubator Man*. My congratulations to its author, Wallace West."

"I chanced to read your October issue of WEIRD TALES presented to me by a friend to pass an afternoon away," writes Raymond V. Carroll, of Ellicottville, New York, in a letter to The Eyrie, "and I must confess that I thoroughly enjoyed the occasion. The afternoon proved to be one of the shortest and most entertaining I have experienced for some time, despite the fact that it was a rainy, dismal day and my spirits were at low ebb. I am looking forward with interest to finishing the number. *The Dream Chair* by Leroy Ernest Fess is certainly an original tale, the like of which I haven't read in years. *The Temple of Serpents* and *The Dancing Death* are certainly eery tales that held and fascinated me, and I trust that these authors will continue to contribute to your most unusual magazine."

Chester A. Brown, of Weeksbury, Kentucky, writes: "I like your magazine. It gives one's mental teeth something quite different to chew on. WEIRD

TALES gives its readers palatable diets which I find to be well cooked by your staff of ink-slinging chefs—meaning such excellent writers as Seabury Quinn, Mary McEnnery Erhard, A. Leslie, Victor Rousseau and all the rest. It would be rather impossible for me to fill out the Favorite Coupon, as I regard them all as favorite stories. No exceptions in the case; all are what they should be—and more."

From Hot Springs, Arkansas, Mrs. Charles Brandenburg writes to The Eyrie: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for three years, and am wild about it in every particular, except one. That is, I wish you would not publish such stories as *Crashing Suns,* or in fact any scientific story. They are far too imaginative for me to enjoy. I believe that you can always find plenty of stories on earth of a weird nature. My idea is that the scientific nature of these stories takes away all the pleasure of reading them. I like African bush tales and tales of India, China, and ocean or ship tales. I buy one magazine a month, and that is WEIRD TALES, because it is entirely different and gives one something to think about. I hope it continues to be as interesting as it is now."

"Why didn't you have a cover picture for *Crashing Suns?*" asks Jack Darrow, of Chicago. "You haven't had a cover picture for any of Edmond Hamilton's stories since *The Metal Giants,* in the December issue of 1926. *Crashing Suns* was the best story in both of the two issues in which it ran. *Body and Soul,* by Seabury Quinn, and *The Oath of Hul Jok,* by Nietzin Dyalhis, come next, in the September issue."

"I want to say a word for the poems of A. Leslie," writes Lilla Price Savino, of Portsmouth, Virginia. "I think him a genius, and I am always glad to see his name in the table of contents; that is the first page to which I turn, before I leave the book store, and if I miss the names of Seabury Quinn and Eli Colter I am disappointed."

Writes Mabel O'Neil, of Pawtucket, Rhode Island: "I love A. Leslie's poems. I have one in my scrapbook copied from WEIRD TALES quite a while ago, and can't remember the title to it. The first stanza was as follows:

"'Ashes of sky-flame glowing,
Thunder of tide on the bars,
Night, and a wild wind blowing
A curse to the screaming stars.'"

[The poem is *Elysium,* and appeared in WEIRD TALES for September, 1926.—EDITOR.]

Norman E. Marland, of Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes to The Eyrie: "I see you are publishing in book form A. G. Birch's story, *The Moon Terror,* which ran serially in WEIRD TALES in 1923. It ought to be a great success. I am looking forward to the publication of Seabury Quinn's stories of Jules de Grandin in a book, as that would seem to be a foregone conclusion. But

(Continued on page 856)

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

THE DEVIL-PEOPLE, *by Seabury Quinn*

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(Continued from page 854)

I would like to know if others feel as I do about a book of the WEIRD TALES stories of that master-writer Henry S. Whitehead. It seems to me that a collection of his Jumbee stories would be a sweeping success, and I hope you will publish my letter and so let us discover whether or not WEIRD TALES readers are sufficiently lovers of the best in weird fiction to demand a Henry S. Whitehead book."

"I liked Smith's tale in the September WEIRD TALES immensely," writes Frank Belknap Long, Jr., author of *The Space-Eaters* and other popular stories that have appeared in this magazine. "And Robert E. Howard's poem, *The Harp of Alfred*, is—literature. The last stanza is worthy of G. K. Chesterton."

Readers, we value your criticism, whether it consists of enthusiastic praise or whether it consists of pointing out faults that you want remedied. We are always looking for different stories, really unusual tales worthily handled, and we can not know whether the stories we print have succeeded in pleasing you unless you write to us and tell us. What is your favorite story in this issue? And if there are stories that you do not like, let us know. WEIRD TALES is *your* magazine, and we want to keep it in accordance with your wishes.

Your favorite story in the October issue, as shown by your votes, is Seabury Quinn's exquisite vampire-tale, *Restless Souls*. This is closely pressed for first place by the first part of H. Warner Munn's serial story, *The Werewolf's Daughter*.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE DECEMBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why? ----------

(2)---------- ----------

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Reader's name and address:

Beyond Power of Man

(Continued from page 756)

sibly I won't imagine I feel eyes staring at me if I leave this particular room. Besides, I don't like the misshapen appearance of that dead rat. . . .

I HAVE reseated myself here at the table in the grip of such fear as I never thought a man could bear and live. I shall pay heavily for this experience. I shall go away in the morning—if I live till morning—with scars on my soul from this night.

There *is* some power, something in the house with me. Here beside me. The reason I say that? I can't leave the room!

I tried to go upstairs—and was stopped as though I had run into a wall. I fought and pushed against the thing that held me. It was useless. A hand pressed against me—an unbelievable hand that seemed to cover my body from neck to waist and shoulder to shoulder. It was playful, that hand. It gave me a little shake that sent me smashing against the opposite wall.

I'm afraid I lost control of myself for a few minutes. I remember I tried to run. At every door I was thrown back. Once I fell over the table in the darkness. Always that hand stopped me at every door. The last time it crawled up my body and stopped at my throat, a thumb and forefinger curled around my neck.

The room was in darkness when I came to. After a long time I found the candle. It was mashed flat. I managed to mold the warm wax into usable shape and lit the wick again. Then I picked up my pencil automatically. Thank God for it! If I didn't have some slight thing to do I'm afraid my reason would crack.

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The human mind won't stand too much. Why did I ever come here?

I must be calm. I must plan how to escape from this awful place. But how can I get away with the doors barred to me by that hand?

And what is this power I sneered at? How did I dare to come here? Why does it keep me prisoner in this room? What does it want with me? Why did it wall me up in this house as cut off from the world as though I were already in my grave? What is it going to *do* to me?

I begin to understand. A game. A terrible game. Torture.

A moment ago a hand clamped around my waist. Think of a hand big enough to encircle a man's waist! It tightened. Tightened. Everything turned black.

Before I was completely unconscious the pressure relaxed. My bruised solar plexus nerves revolted. I rocked with illness. That snarling laughter echoes again. If I could only get out of here! I must get out! But the shutters hardly tremble as I pound at them. The hand still holds me from the doors. I am let alone for an instant. . . .

A stab of pain. My left wrist has been twisted.

Huge fingers lift me bodily from the stool and smash me down again. Another touch. My wrist!

What hatred has this thing conceived for me? I am pinched, wrenched, twisted. I can see nothing. I feel a white light of pain. A bruise appears on my arm where the sleeve has been torn off. I see nothing. Nothing!

God! I hate this monster! Yes, I hate you! Torture me all the more for saying it. I hate you! I will hurt you as you are hurting me. See—I smash you with this stool!

The stool passes through empty air.

I pound the table with my fist. The hand just clutched at my left shoulder. My whole side is limp and numb.

I will kill this thing! I will! I will! I will avenge myself! Smash it! Twist it in my hands! I will kill it! What can I do to kill it? How can I hurt it?

An idea comes to me. It is a great idea. A glorious idea. I shout with the power of it. I sing with the triumph of it. I will revenge myself!

Now I grow calm. Easy now. Cool and shrewd. I mustn't let the thing suspect. I stop the laugh that comes to my lips. I will kill it! How easy it will be—the simplest thing!

I will kill it with fire. No life can stand fire, can breathe flame. Not even supernatural life. In fire the thing would twist and die like any human. But I must be calm. I must think. I must plan how to trap the monster that tears at me.

If I can only set fire to the house. It can not get out. The windows are wedged solid. I must fire the house. I can do it with this candle that glitters before me.

I must let the fire get a big start. Otherwise the thing would smash it down with its hands. If only it will go away for a few minutes. Just a few minutes. A few minutes to set fire to the house.

How can I make it go away? I must do something to make it go away. Ah! I must pretend to faint. I will slump forward over the table and then I will stay still. As still as the dead rat on the floor! No matter how the hands twist at me I will stay still. The thing may go upstairs or into another room. Only an instant. All I need to fire the house. . . .

He did! He did! The monster is stupid. Now he has gone upstairs. He gouged at me with his hands but I was still. As still as the dead rat. Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha! He thought I was dead. He thought I was dead like the rat. The rat and I! The rat and I! Ha ha ha!

Hush! You mustn't laugh. You must be quiet. You, rat. You must be quiet too. If the monster hears us he may come back. He may come back before I have fired the house. Just a little more, rat. One more touch and I'm done.

What a joke on the monster! To come back and find the room, the house on fire. And he can't get out. You can't get out. Nothing can get out. He will burn! The monster will burn. Fire will eat up the big clawing hands. And I will laugh. Ha ha ha!

Laugh, rat. It is a great joke we are having, you and I. See. Here flames. There flames. The walls. The ceiling. It scorches my face. . . .

Now he is running down from the garret. Do you hear him, rat? The stairs shake. He sees the fire and howls. How he screams! And I laugh aloud at him. . . .

I must not laugh! I must enjoy this revenge. He will writhe and howl in the fire. I must not laugh like this. I will not laugh! I bite my lips. There is red on my hands as I touch my lips.

Silence. Awful silence. Why doesn't the monster cry out? He sees there is no escape. He will die!

What is the thing going to do? I can't see what it is doing. I see nothing. Nothing but a wall of fire.

What will the thing do to me? Will it blame me for the fire? I did not start the fire. The rat did. The rat started the fire!

What is it going to do to me? I can't see. Not a sound. . . .

What is it going to do to me? . . .

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The Chapel of Mystic Horror

(Continued from page 748)

stone by single stone, to this country from Cyprus?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"Very good. The stones of which it is erected were probably quarried from the ruins of some heathen temple, and like sponges soaked in water, they were full to overflowing with evil influences. This evil undoubtlessly affected the old warrior knights who dwelt in that house, probably from 1191, when Richard of England sold Cyprus to their order, to 1308, when the French king and the Roman pope suppressed and destroyed the order—and shared its riches between them.

"That the souls of those old monks who had forsaken their vows to the God of Love to serve the Goddess of Lust with unclean rites and ceremonies could not find rest in peaceful graves there is little doubt. But that they were able to materialize and carry on the obscenities they had practised in life, there is also much doubt. Some ghosts there are who can make themselves visible at will; others can materialize at certain times and in certain places only; others can show themselves only with the aid of a medium.

"When the rich Monsieur Profiteer took up the old house and brought it to America, he doubtless imported all its evil influences intact; but they were latent.

"Then, only one little week ago, that which was needful came to the house. It was nothing less than Mademoiselle O'Shane's so beautiful self. She, my friend, is what the spiritualists call a sensitive, a psychic. She is attuned to the fine vibrations which affect the ordinary person not at all. And she was the innocent medium through which the wicked old knights were able to effect a reincarnation.

"The air may be filled with the ethereal waves from a thousand broadcasting stations, but if you have not a radio machine to entrap and consolidate those waves into sound, you are helpless to hear so much as a single squeal of static. Is it not so? Very good. Mademoiselle Dunroe was the radio set—the condenser and the amplifying agent needed to release the invisible wickedness which came from Cytherea's wicked altar—the discarnate intelligences which were once bad men. Do you not recall how she was greeted in the chapel of the Black Lodge: 'Hail, Priestess and Queen—*She Who Gives Her Servants Life and Being*'? Those wicked things which once were men admitted their debt to her in that salutation, my friend.

"Remember how Mademoiselle Dunroe told you of her inability to draw what she wished? The evil influences were already beginning to steal her brain and make her pliable to their base desires. They were beginning to lay plans to feed upon her vitality to clothe themselves in the semblance of humanity, and as they possessed her, she saw with her inward eye the scenes so many times heretofore enacted in that terrible underground chapel.

"From the first I liked not the house, and when the poor Mademoiselle Dunroe told us of her troubles with her drawings, I liked it still less. How long it would have taken those old secret worshipers of evil to make themselves visible by the use of Mademoiselle Dunroe's vitality, I do not know. Perhaps they might never have succeeded. Perhaps she would have gone away and nothing more would have been heard of them, but that flap-eared she-ass of a Mademoiselle Prettybridge played the precise game the long-dead villains desired. When she held her so absurd séance

(Continued on page 862)

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(Continued from page 860)
in the dining-room that night, she furnished them just the atmosphere they needed to place their silent command in Mademoiselle O'Shane's mind. Her attention was fixed on ghostly things; 'Ah-ha,' says the master of the Black Lodge, 'now we shall steal her mind. Now we shall make her go into a trance like a medium, and she shall materialize us, and *là, là*, what deviltry we shall do!' And so they did. While they sent one of their number to thump upon the table and hold us spellbound listening to his nonsense rimes, the rest of them became material and rode forth upon their phantom steeds to steal them a little child. Oh, my friend, I dare not think what would have been had they carried through that dreadful blood-sacrifice. Warm blood acts upon the wicked spirits as tonic acts on humans. They might have become so strong no power on earth could have stayed them! As it was, the ancient evil could be killed, but it died very, very hard."

"Was Dunroe under their influence when we saw her at the piano that night?" I asked.

"Undoubtlessly. Already they had made her draw things she did not consciously understand; then, when they had roused her from her bed and guided her to the instrument, she played first a composition of beauty, for she is a good girl at heart, but they wished her to play something evil. Music hath charms to do more than soothe the savage breast, my friend. The drums drive the African black to frenzy; the sound of the bugle gives courage to the soldier; myself, I cry like a babe when I hear the band play *La Marseillaise*. No doubt the wicked, lecherous tune she played under their guidance that night helped mightily to make good, God-fearing Dunroe O'Shane forget herself and serve as heathen priestess before the heathen altar of a band of forsworn renegade priests."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1928.

State of Illinois } ss.
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

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WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1928. O. F. DAHLSTROM,
[SEAL] **Notary Public.**
My commission expires July 26, 1932.

"H'm," I murmured dubiously. "Granting your premises, I can see the logic of your conclusions, but how was it you put those terrible ghosts to flight so easily?"

"I waited for that question," he answered with a laugh. "Have you not yet learned Jules de Grandin is a very clever fellow, Friend Trowbridge? *Parbleu,* I have known it for years!

"Attend me, for what I say is worth hearing. When those evil men went forth in search of prey and killed the poor policeman, I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, you have here a tough nut to crack; *mordieu,* a very tough nut, indeed!'

" 'I know it,' I reply.

" 'Very well, then,' I ask me, 'who are these goblin child-stealers?'

" 'Ghosts—or the evil representations of wicked men who died long years ago in mortal sin,' I return.

" 'Now,' I say, 'you are sure these men are materialized by Mademoiselle O'Shane—her strange playing, her unwitting drawings, her trance at the so odious Mademoiselle Prettybridge's table-tapping party, they all prove it. What, then, is such a materialization composed of?'

" 'Of what some call ectoplasm, others psychoplasm,' I reply.

" 'But certainly'—I will not give myself peace till I have talked this matter over completely—'but what is that psychoplasm, or ectoplasm? Tell me that?'

"And then, as I think, and think some more, I come to the conclusion it is but a very fine form of vibration given off by the medium, just as the ether-waves are given off by the broadcasting station. When it combines with the thin-unpowerful vibration set up by the evil entity to be materialized, it makes the outward seeming of a man—what we call a ghost.

"I decided to try a desperate experiment. A sprig of the Holy Thorn

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of Glastonbury may be efficacious as a charm, but charms are of no avail against an evil which is very old and very powerful. Nevertheless, I will try the Holy Thorn-bush. If it fail, I must have a second line of defense. What shall it be?

"Why not radium salt? Radium does wonderful things. In its presence non-conductors of electricity become conductors; Leyden jars can not retain their charges of electricity in its presence. For why? Because of its tremendous vibration. If I uncover a bit of radium bromide from its lead box in that small, enclosed chapel, the terrific bombardment of the Alpha, Tau and Gamma rays it gives off as its atoms disintegrate will shiver those thin-vibration ghosts to nothingness even as the Boche shells crushed the forts of Liège!

"I think I have an idea—but I am not sure it will work. At any rate, it is worth trying. So, while Mademoiselle O'Shane lies unconscious under the influence of evil, I rush here with you, borrow a tiny little tube of radium bromide from the City Hospital, and make ready to fight the evil ones. Then, when we follow Mademoiselle Dunroe into that accursed chapel under the earth, I am ready to make the experiment.

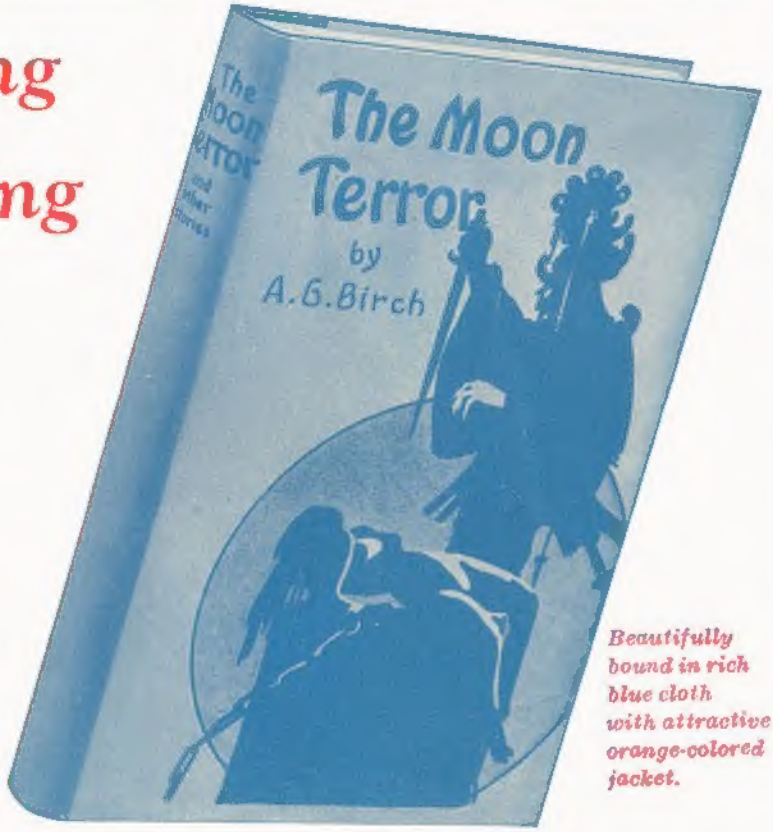
"At the first door stands the boy, who was not so steeped in evil as his elders, and he succumbed to the Holy Thorn sprig. But once inside the chapel, I see we need something which will batter those evil spirits to shreds, so I unseal my tube of radium, and—*pouf!* I shake them to nothing in no time!"

"But won't they ever haunt the Cloisters again?" I persisted.

"*Ah bah*, have I not said I have destroyed them—utterly?" he demanded. "Let us speak of them no more. The mention of them gives me a bad taste in the mouth. I must wash it away!"

And with a single prodigious gulp he emptied his goblet of brandy.

Startling Amazing Sensational !



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"Don't spoil the party"

.. someone called when I sat down at the piano

—a moment later they got the surprise of their lives!

I WAS just about to enter the room when I overheard Bill saying, "It'll seem like old times to have Dan with us again!"

"You'd better lock the piano!" came the laughing rejoinder.

"Nonsense! He won't have the nerve to play after what happened the last time!"

"That was a shabby trick. I almost wish we hadn't pulled it. . . ."

How well I knew what they were talking about!

At the last party I had attended I had sat down at the piano and in my usual "chopstick" fashion started playing some popular numbers.

Before long, however, I had noticed an unusual stillness. I stopped playing, turned around, and saw—*the room was empty!*

Instead of entertaining the party, as I had fondly imagined, my halting, stumbling performance had been a nuisance.

Burning with shame and indignation I had determined to turn the tables. At last tonight, the moment had come.

Every one seemed overjoyed to see me again—obviously glad that I had evidently forgiven and forgotten last year's trick.

Suddenly I turned to Bill and said, "Hope you've had the piano tuned, old boy. I feel just in the mood. . . ."

Instantly the friendly atmosphere changed. It was amusing to see the look that spread from face to face. For a moment no one spoke. Then, just as I was sitting down at the piano, some one called:

"For heaven's sake, get away from that piano! *Don't spoil the party!*"

That was my cue. Instead of replying I struck the first bars of "Sundown." And how! Easily, smoothly, with all the verve and expression I had always longed for!

I Fool My Friends

The guests gasped with amazement. Fascinated, scarcely believing their ears, they drew nearer. When I finished they loudly clamored for more. Time and again, when I would have stopped, they eagerly insisted on "Just one more, please!"

When they finally allowed me to leave the piano I turned around and said:

"Just a moment, folks! I want to thank you for what you did for me last year!"

The eager, laughing faces turned red with embarrassment. One or two of the boys murmured an apology. Seeing their confusion, I continued:

"I mean it! If you hadn't opened my eyes, I'd still be a duh at playing. I went home mighty angry that night, I'll admit. But it taught me a lesson. And believe me, folks, when I think of the real pleasure I get out of playing now, I'm only sorry you didn't pull that trick sooner!"

Before letting me go home that night Bill demanded *"How did you do it?"*

I laughed. "Why, I just took advantage of a new way to learn music, that's all!"

"What! Didn't you take lessons from a teacher?"

"No! *I taught myself!* When that trick showed me up last year, I sent to the U. S. School of Music for one of their free demonstration lessons. Well, it proved to be so much easier than I had hopd for, that I sent for the complete course. And believe me, I'm mighty glad I did! There wasn't any expensive private teacher to pay—and since the lessons came by mail, I didn't have to set aside valuable hours to study. I practiced only in my spare time, a few minutes a day. And the course is thorough! Why, almost before I knew it, I could play *anything*—ballads, rhapsodies, waltzes, jazz!"

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